

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



MARCH 1984

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An Unusual Mike Shayne Adventure

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

by MIKE SHAYNE (himself)
as told to TIM ROURKE
writing as BRETT HALLIDAY
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ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

by Mike Shayne

A private eye's life is not always filled with beautiful blondes, hard liquor, and enemy agents. This time around the red-headed Miami shamus himself tells it like it is! 4

SHORT STORIES

DEATH IN THE COUNTRY

R. Tuttle 20

MY VICTIM, MY KILLER

Edward W. Ludwig 36

THE BIG SCORE

James Gordon White 50

BEHOLD A PALE HORSE

Richard E. Givan 63

LIONS OF THE NIGHT

Lee Duigon 73

THE LAVALIER

Carl Jacobi 83

THE UPPER HAND

Alan Warren 91

NOBODY'S FOOL

Helen O'Shea 98

THE INDISPENSABLE MAN

Arthur Moore 104

FULL CIRCLE

A.M. Lightner 110

BIOLOGY CLASS

Jessica Amanda Salmonson 115

STUCK FOR THE SOLUTION

Diane Chapman 120

FEATURES

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS 62

STIFF COMPETITION (Book Reviews)

John Ball 127

Okay, you MSMM fans, listen and listen good. This is Mike Shayne talking to you. That's right, the big redheaded Miami shamus in person, and I'm going to give you the straight scoop. The whole truth and nothing but. None of that hogwash Brett Halliday's been handing out.

So pay attention!

All in a Day's Work

by MIKE SHAYNE (himself)

as told to TIM ROURKE
writing as BRETT HALLIDAY

IT HAD BEEN A ROUGH DAY. MY MOUTH FELT THE WAY a rhinoceros' skin looked and champagne never tasted—very dry. I had been tailing some small-time coke dealer in hopes of reaching his big-league supplier, but I had finally realized the guy was Class A at best. The case was going nowhere, but I wasn't. I pointed the Buick in the direction of the Beef House and let my better instincts take over. The last time that had happened I had refused to take a social security check for helping a widow locate her son. Someday I was going to get control of my instincts.

I thought of Lucy sitting in the office like a faithful wife waiting for me to return. Guilt—it's almost as bad as instincts. When I thought about those things and glanced into the mirror at the lines under my eyes, I knew I had the basis for winning the argument against free will.

When I got into this business, I promised myself I'd get out if I stopped enjoying it. Right now something in my mind was searching for an exit sign. In the last week I had turned down two trail-the-wayward-husband cases, three repo jobs, four calling birds, and a chance to win the Publisher's Clearing House sweepstakes. The Buick's air conditioner was out, my landlord was trying to rent my office to a would-be El Presidente of Cuba, and my secretary had started believing all the fiction Tim Rourke cranked out every night about me under some pen name—talk about a busman's holiday. If I had done all the

things he claimed, I'd be as rich as J. Paul Getty, as athletic as O.J. Simpson, as much a stud as Redford, as macho as Eastwood, and as brilliant as Sherlock Holmes. My tiny office on Flagler Street wouldn't have been large enough to hold my money bags, my broads, my Gympac, and my ego. Something would have to go. Me.

I walked into the Beef House, started to order a Martell, saw a smug Tim Rourke sitting there, and switched to a draft. The reporter had plopped himself down in my favorite booth with enough computer printouts to keep a hamster farm happy. "Glad you're here, shamus," the reporter said through a haze of chained smoke. "Got a few facts I want to check."

"What story you working on?" I asked. "That expose on spring chickens cruising Collins Avenue?"

"Not exactly. Last night I was really cooking on the word processor and finished fifteen thousand words of pure gold, *Death Stalks Miami.*"

I knew I should have ordered something stronger. "Not another potboiler about me for that California-based pulp?"

He stared at me over his printouts as if they had been a first edition of Shakespeare. "How can you of all people run down the contemporary literary epic that critics will someday call *The Shayniad?*"

"Look, Tim, I don't mind if you put me in some of your *Daily News* stories, but this fiction you've been cranking out is just too much."

"Hey; is it my fault you lead such an exciting life?"

"I'll admit what I do's not boring, but you have me investigating international conspiracies, Mafia wars, spies, and corrupt senators non-stop. If I did everything you give credit for, I wouldn't have any time to eat or sleep. And that brings up some other points. I have been known to drink something other than cognac, I usually get eight-hours sleep, I eat regularly, and my diet consists of something other than steak smothered in onions."

"Pat," interrupted my friend, "two Martells."

"My God, Tim, I weigh over two-hundred pounds. If I missed as many meals as your stories claim, I wouldn't have the energy to duck all those gunshots, knives, grenades, neutron bombs." I was on a roll now. "How could I win every fight with all those hired thugs and Oriental assassins?"

"Hey, shamus," he said, lighting another cigarette from the dying one in his hand, "maybe on rare occasions I do . . . stretch things just a bit, but my readers need a hero. I mean, once you grow past

Superman and Nancy Drew, what'a you got? JFK fiddled and faddled around the White House, and the whole NBA's brought a new meaning to 'Coke is it'."

I pulled out a Camel, then put it away. "Hey, Pat," I called to the bartender, "toss me a pack of filtereds."

Tim's jaw dropped low enough to back in his Toyota.

"You see," I continued, "I don't always smoke Camels. And if you noticed, I lit my cigarette—I didn't *fire* it up. When was the first time I called you 'pal,' tugged on my earlobe, or rasped my thumbnail across my chin, which you notice doesn't show a day's red stubble?"

"Come on, Mike, those things are part of the Mike Shayne my readers know and love."

"Love. Listen, pal, I mean, Tim, my relationship with Lucy has a NO TRESPASSING sign on it. There are some things I wish you'd stay away from."

"I understand, believe me. In the past few issues I've had you involved with any number of women—prostitutes, assassins, college coeds."

"How come they're always beautiful redheads, beautiful blondes, beautiful brunettes? In my business most of the hookers have so many coats of paint, who knows what they look like, and the last female I rescued was five foot, one inch tall and weighed a hundred-and-sixty pounds—not your basic centerfold."

"Gimme a break, Mike. After hours, I'm in the entertainment business. When America reads about their favorite rawboned redhead . . ."

I almost choked on my Budweiser. "That kind of description's got to go too. I'm always 'the Magic City detective,' 'the big investigator,' 'the steel-eyed sleuth.' Why can't I be plain old Mike Shayne, a \$400/day P.I. who lives in a real world and, if he can stay alive doing it, tries his best to make that world a little better than he found it? No superhero feats, no save-the-world fantasies, no . . ."

"Excuse me," interrupted a sultry voice from behind me, "did you say your name was Mike Shayne?"

I turned to see a blonde.

I said, "What can I do for you, miss?"

"Mrs. Carolyn See," she said. "Your secretary let me know where to find you because I told her it was urgent."

"How urgent?"

"Somebody's trying to kill me."

Under his breath, I heard Tim Rourke mumble, "The big redhead

lowered his steel-grey eyes from the beautiful blonde's well-tanned face to a strapless gown-exposed cleavage that made Biscayne Bay look like a puddle."

Well, it was after hours, arguing with Miami's answer to Ross MacDonald was useless, and besides, the blonde did have the kind of face that made your knees weak. So I offered her a seat and said, "What makes you think someone's trying to kill you?"

"If you're willing to come to my house, I could show you."

Out of the corner of my eye I noticed Tim's pen scribbling furiously. "Where do you live?"

She gave me a Coral Gables address that didn't sound familiar.

"Do you," I continued, "know of anybody who'd have a reason to want to hurt you?"

"No. My husband and I are just everyday people. We only moved to Miami a month ago. We haven't had time to make any enemies."

"Then why do you think somebody's after you?" I asked, glad the great American novelist was here to listen to a routine case.

"Last night Arthur was working late, and I was home alone. About ten I think somebody tried to break into the house."

"Did you call the police?"

"Of course, but they didn't find anything. I'm sure they wrote me off as the typical woman-alone-gets-scared. I'll bet they didn't even file a report."

"Why do you want me to come look?"

"I've read about you."

"Where?" I hoped that when she went to the supermarket she settled on *Good Housekeeping*.

"The newspaper naturally."

I drained the glass in relief.

"Well," she pressed, "will you come out?"

If anything, she had probably been scared by some amateur second-story man, and besides my only other choice was *Monday Night Football*, and I wasn't wetting my pants over the prospects of seeing Tampa Bay clash with Houston. "O.K."

She stood up and shook my hand. "Good. Here's our address. We'll expect you in an hour."

By the time her lingering perfume had been strangled by the bar's cigarette smoke, Tim had put down his pen. I grabbed the notebook from him and began to read:

"The rawboned redhead wiped the flood of tears from her sapphire-blue eyes . . . 'I'm begging you,' she sobbed. 'Sooner or later my past

was bound to catch up to me' . . . She urged her firm breasts into Shayne's sinewy shoulder . . . 'How can I ever repay you?' . . . She brought her full lips up to his as though they were a loving cup."

I threw the notebook at Tim. "This is exactly the kind of thing I've been talking about."

Tim launched a perfect smoke ring in my direction. "It is good, isn't it?"

THE CORAL GABLES ADDRESS WAS IN A NEIGHBORHOOD that should have had middle-middle class written on the street sign. Small, stucco tract houses that had been built in the 50s popped out of the neatly mowed lawns in the twilight. TV antennas, five-year-old sedans and station wagons, bicycles in the cracked driveways. The only thing missing was Beaver Cleaver.

She opened the door on the first knock and invited me into a living room that looked like it had been decorated by Furniture City Discount. The java and fig newtons sitting on the coffee table reminded me I had forgotten to eat. The brand new, 25-inch RCA wasn't tuned to *The Howard Cosell Show*. I could tell the Sees had class.

"This is Arthur," she said.

Her husband was a vanilla milkshake personified. At 5 feet, 9 inches and 190 pounds, he was the kind of guy who could have pulled off a daylight bank robbery and no witness would have remembered enough to describe him. I shook his firm grip and guessed he was a salesman.

"I noticed, Mr. Shayne," he said, "that your unit out there on the street has a few years on her. You're in luck. I just stole this '79 Olds 88."

"Arthur sells cars," she said, handing me a ceramic mug that had I and COFFEE separated by a big red heart.

"Yeah," said Arthur, cramming a cookie into his mouth, "sometimes I bring the office home with me, if you know what I mean."

"Mr. Shayne," she said, sitting and crossing her legs, "I have a confession to make right up front. I didn't tell you the truth earlier."

I was glad Tim wasn't there.

"What Carol means," said Arthur, "is . . . well . . ."

"Before we married," she said, "I insisted on telling Arthur the whole sordid story of my past."

Why was this conversation starting to sound like a lead novella in Tim's mystery magazine?

She was fidgeting with an expensive chess set on the coffee table as she said, "Arthur's not my first husband." Gently the car salesman

reached out and cupped his hands over hers. "We met in Washington in the SAC." The two tittered like those inane couples on *The Newlywed Game*.

"SAC," said Arthur quickly, "is the Singles Alone Club. It's a support group."

"You see, she said, "Jack, my first husband, fled the country to avoid both government prosecution and reprisals from the mob. He was connected, you know, long before that story broke in the *Post*. I was going to leave him anyway. He only married me so Daddy's money could finance his campaign. Maybe it was partially my fault. After I had done some work in Paris for the CIA, being a Congressman's wife was mash potatoes without the butter."

This wasn't happening to me. My jittery housewife was quickly becoming a modern-day Mata Hari.

Arthur See poured himself another cup of coffee. "I told Carol that what happened last night was nothing. She was alone, heard a sound, and let her imagination run away with her."

As she sat there in a daze-like state, turning an Arabian knight in her fingers, Arthur led me into the kitchen. "Look, there's no sign of forced entry. Nothing is missing." He pulled me close like he was about to cement a deal on an option-loaded El Dorado. "I agreed to let her contact you just to humor her. She's a good woman who's had some hard knocks in her life. Having you drop by has already done more for her than a truckload of those Valiums she's always throwing down." He ushered me out the kitchen door into the adjoining one-car garage. "Just between you and me, I'd treat all my wife's stories about her past like a Disney cartoon." A bad hunch stuck in my ribs like a stiletto.

FOR THE THIRD TIME I POUNDED ON THE PAINT-PEELED door. I knew he was in there.

Finally the Stan Laurel face appeared in the doorway.

"Shamus," he said, "you're just in time for the second-half kickoff. Nobody should be forced to sit through this dog alone." He pointed at a TV set that was older than his favorite wine.

I pushed past him. "O.K., Tim, you've had your little joke."

"What are you talking about? The only joke here is on the tube—masquerading as a football game."

"You know what I mean, pal." I broke open a pack of Camels and fired one up. "How much did Little Miss Blue-eyes and Mr. Bland cost you?"

Tim's look told me he refused to give up his scam easily.

"I have to admit," I said, "you had me going there for awhile. Setting the game up to look like a routine case and then pulling the plug. But why? April first is six months away."

"Usually guys in your condition see pink elephants." He handed me an amber bottle. "Have some Old Rotgut—it'll cure what ails you."

I took the spotted glass, but not the double-talk. "O.K., Shakespeare, if you're trying to convince me with this little drama that those stories you write are anywhere close to reality you might as well waste your money on a long shot at Hialeah."

"Oh, wait a minute. The girl at the Beef House. Her story turned out to be a little more complicated than that. Hey, shamus, I'm not a ballplayer. I'm an ump—I calls 'em as I sees 'em."

I got a funny feeling in my stomach, and it wasn't from the lack of food. "You mean you didn't set up . . .?"

"Back to square one, shamus." Tim sat down in the threadbare easychair. "I'd love to continue this little contretemps, but I've got to get back to the tube and this clash of titans. There's a good chance that this half one of the teams might actually cross the fifty-yard line."

Tim had long since given up the ghost when Tampa Bay missed a chip-shot field goal to send the game into O.T. I continued to watch. I felt I deserved the punishment.

About 12:30 the overtime in a scoreless game was pronounced officially dead by a gun. They should have used it to put the Bucs and Oilers out of their misery.

WHEN I WAS A KID, A TEACHER SAID THAT PUTTING something over on me was like trying to sneak the sun past a rooster. Well, it was 9:00 A.M., and I wasn't crowing about this "case." That feeling in my ribs had dropped to my gut, telling me there was more to Carolyn See's story than she was letting on. A lot of women fantasize about travel or a lover, but the only person who could make up a tale like hers was Robert Ludlum—or Tim Rourke.

Six knocks on her wooden front door brought nothing but sore knuckles. I'd waited till 9:00 to avoid Arthur See. The blonde was the focal point, and I wanted to see her alone.

Sandwiched between the odor of newly-cut Bermuda grass and dog-poop came the faint smell of gas.

It was too early in the day for barbecues, so I put my shoulder to the door. It splintered easily.

The living room looked like a hurricane had just passed through. Lying on the sunburst-orange couch was Carolyn See. I picked her up and carried her outside. I had hated the CPR class from the moment

Lucy had signed me up, but as I forced air into the unconscious woman, I realized those Thursday nights hadn't been wasted.

A long, black limo slid up to the curb behind my "unit." Between breaths I noticed a silver-haired man in a banker-gray suit being let out.

"Get that low-life off my daughter, Harrington," he shouted.

Carolyn See coughed in my face.

Harrington came tearing across the poop-laden lawn. Bulging out of his chauffeur's dark uniform, he looked like a Steeler linebacker closing in for the tackle.

"What . . . what's going on?" she said.

"Hey, buddy," called Harrington, showing me a hamhock where most men had hands.

With one flick of my wrist I changed his part in the church choir from bass to soprano.

"Holy shit!" he screamed as he fell backward into the grass.

"Daddy!" said the groggy blonde.

"I knew this would happen when you married that nobody . . .," started the gray suit.

"Shut up, Daddy!" she said. "I almost die and you decide it's time for another chorus of 'I told you so's.'"

I helped her to her feet. We were standing next to an ornamental figure of Cupid that had seen better days and families. She brushed the grass off her dress. It was the same one she had had on the night before.

"Thank you," she said to me, then turned. "Daddy, this is Michael Shayne. He just saved my life."

The distinguished-looking figure just stared at me. He obviously wasn't in the habit of saying "I'm sorry." Any second now he was going to reach for his checkbook to make all right with the world.

"What's happened?" I said to her.

"I . . . I don't know," she said. "The last thing I remember was Arthur sitting beside me watching some dumb game."

Well, she knew her football. "Your house is filled with gas," I said.

"There's an old space heater in the hallway. Arthur must have lit it last night when I complained I was cold. The pilot light's always going out."

"Carolyn, we must talk," interrupted her father.

"Butt off," she said. "You haven't said a kind word to me since Arthur and I got married three months ago."

I watched his muscles tense, almost wishing he'd slap her.

Instead he said, "Young lady, just because you . . ."

"I know you don't approve of our marriage," she said, "but all I'm asking is that you leave us alone."

He used a few choice words that most people assume only men say to each other. I took a step forward and felt her fingers on my bicep.

While I hesitated, Daddy pivoted and, grabbing his chauffeur like a misbehaved child, marched back to his limo. I stopped counting the dog-poops he splattered after three.

The limo left in slow motion. We sat down on the porch. It seemed to be the only safe place in the yard.

The first thing she said was, "I don't want Arthur to find out about any of this."

"Agreed."

"One more thing." Her eyes seemed to reflect the deep blue of the morning sky. "You left without telling me last night. Are you going to take this case?"

How could you say no to a woman who had an over-protective husband, an over-concerned father, and a lawn full of dog-poop?

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN IN LOVE WITH MA BELL. SINCE A P.I. gets about as much walk-in trade as an undertaker, I use the Yellow Pages—a lot of my legwork means letting my fingers do the walking. When I had bailed out two CIA agents in a spy plane case that only Tim Rourke's mighty pen could make sense of, the Company had given me an I.O.U. in the form of a very private phone number.

The problem was, as I didn't dare write it down I was always forgetting it.

Yepremian, Gries, Moore, Fleming, Czonka, and Warfield. Mentally picturing the six Dolphins standing side by side, I had it. I just dialed their uniform numbers starting with 1 for Yepremian.

Eventually I was connected to Tony Pegas. When I explained what I wanted, he told me to show up at the phone booth at the corner of Flagler and LeJeune in one hour. By then he'd have the information.

THE GUY IN THE PHONE BOOTH WAS EITHER AN OUT-OF-work flamenco dancer or one of the Magic City's many gentlemen of leisure. I guessed the latter. It didn't take him long to exit when I explained I'd just seen one of his ladies down the street talking trash to a better-dressed pimp.

The phone rang.

"Shayne," I said, half-expecting the voice at the other end to send me to another booth and so on.

"After this one, mac, we're even."

"Sure."

"One Carolyn Morrow Kensington worked for us as a part-time

mule a few years ago. Used the cover of her father's international company, Morrow Imports. She could travel all over Europe without arousing suspicion. Never could figure out why she liked doing it. Her family's got more money than any Central American country. Anyway, we brought her in when she got too close to Operation Scimitar."

"What's that?"

"May as well tell you. Some hole'll file a Freedom of Information form, and it'll all be declassified anyway. Not that we could prove anything, but we were pretty sure the Russians were bankrolling and supervising a Syrian takeover of Lebanon."

"Did the Russians know she was your courier?" I asked.

"That's why her leash was shortened. Her ex-husband was in the area, and we had him pull her out just before the Great Bear of the North closed its mouth. The Bear's kin to the elephant, though—they both have long memories and don't like anybody stealing their peanuts."

I asked a useless question. "Why don't you guys protect her now?"

"Who?"

"Carolyn Morrow Kensington See."

"Who?"

I gave up. As I was hanging up the phone, I saw Don Diego de la Pimp returning. He was wearing a nasty smile and an even nastier bulge under his cape. I didn't feel like Superman leaving the phone booth, so I jumped in the Buick and headed downtown.

"ON ONE CONDITION," SAID TIM, FINALLY LOOKING UP from his VDT. "I'll help you if you'll scratch my back."

"With what?"

"To tell the truth, shamus, I can't get started on my latest opus. It's a tough thing for an Irishman born with the gift of gab to admit, but I've got writer's block."

"My God, Tim, you just finished one last night."

"Seriously, Miké, my editor in L.A.'s on my back for some good stuff."

"I gave you some of last month's better case files."

"The American public doesn't want to know how Mike Shayne tracked down a runaway poodle or how he spent three weeks staking out a pizzeria in hopes a guy who was delinquent in his child support would order you out. Now this new case of yours . . ."

"Believe me, Tim, the only magazine you could sell this story to is *Family Circle*."

"O.K., O.K., what do you need?"

"Jack Kensington. Does his name ring a bell?"

Tim rolled back his eyes like a swami, and as if in a trance began to speak. "Kensington, he's the ex-Congressman. Got himself in trouble a few years ago. Influence peddling in D.C. Tied into some anti-Israeli lobby. Don't recall if he resigned before or after the F.B.I. got on his tail about those alleged connections with the underworld. He was rumored to be Capitol Hill's link to the narco trade."

"A real model citizen," I said. Carolyn See had had more than H. and R. Block's seventeen reasons to leave him.

"Anyway," Tim continued, "right in the middle of the whole investigation, Kensington pulled down the curtain. I remember our Washington bureau chief couldn't turn up a single lead."

If the *Daily News* computer ever shut down, the paper wouldn't have to worry. They had Tim.

"You know, shamus, funny you should talk about Kensington."

"Why?"

The reporter pulled out a notepad and began to flip the pages. "My memory's not what it used to be." He scanned a page. "Yeah, here it is. You know that story I'm doing on male prostitution along Collins Avenue? This one snitch I've been cultivating dropped that name. As of last week, Kensington was here in Miami." Suddenly Tim sat straight up in his chair. "The blonde's story last night. You're . . ."

I was out the door before he finished.

IN ALL THE YEARS OF DOING STORIES ABOUT ME, THERE'S one thing I never told Tim. In fact, I've never told anybody. When I really want to get away to do some serious thinking, I head for one place—the Orange Bowl. It's amazing how sitting in a box seat in a totally deserted stadium gives you a perspective on things. Maybe it's the size, maybe it's the silence, maybe it's the sun, or maybe it's just sitting in a seat I know I could never afford for a game—but I never think more clearly than when I'm there.

Carolyn See had reason to worry. Even if the pilot light had gone out accidentally, somebody had been in her house to give it a real tossing. Who and what did they want?

Mr. Morrow didn't get along with his daughter, and certainly he had shown a capacity for violence. But to kill his own flesh and blood?

Jack Kensington. He was in town, lacked scruples, and had been cut off by her from a nice source of money. She had said they didn't get along even before she left him.

The Russians. I'd dealt with the Bear enough to know its teeth were sharp.

The mob. Once you're in, you're in and never ever out, and that includes your family. If the muscle boys were after Kensington and couldn't find him, maybe they had decided to make an example out of her.

The shortest distance between the two points was a straight line to Carolyn See's house. I mean, why should I be chasing all over Miami, when there was a good chance that whoever was after her would try again.

This time I wanted to be there before the pilot light went out.

THE STATUE OF CUPID LAY SMASHED ON THE SEE'S sidewalk. As I stepped over the concrete organs, I heard loud voices. I was reaching for the S&W I keep in the small of my back when the door opened, and Arthur See appeared.

"Then, dammit," he shouted inside, "I'll get the money some other way."

Slamming the door, he paused before me and muttered, "Ungrateful bitch!"

I don't think he saw me past his anger as he climbed into a used Caddy and left his imprint on both the driveway and the pavement.

I knocked softly.

"Arthur, I didn't mean . . ." she said, opening the door hurriedly. Her pale face streaked with mascara reminded me of one of Miami's street mimes. She turned her head in obvious disappointment at seeing me.

I walked in. I'd had worse invitations. "Look," I apologized, "I didn't mean to interrupt anything."

Her voice, verging on hysteria, had that forced blandness. "Why can't I make a marriage work? I blew it with Jack. I get lucky and meet Arthur, a decent man, and I'm blowing that too."

"You're being a little hard on yourself." I didn't know if I had said it because I had learned that a flattering comment could open up a person or if I really cared. One of the real dangers of my job is that as you get better at it, you can lose contact with your humanity.

"All he wanted was a little money. His partner's offered to sell out. It's Arthur's chance to make it big. You got a cigarette?"

I torched two Camels and handed her one.

She coughed and continued. "Arthur doesn't understand I don't have any money. Since Jack put the touch on Daddy, I've been cut off. Daddy thinks Arthur's the same way, so he's made it clear that if I want money, all I have to do is bid Arthur adieu."

"Does Arthur know this?"

"Yes, but he also says he knows I could get the money somehow—if I really love him."

I took the butt from her hand before she burned a hole in the orange couch. "How long have you known Arthur?"

"About four months. I met him right after I got back from overseas. It was like a dream. I was at the SAC trying to put my life together, and in he walked."

As a kid I hated fairy tales. While she droned on about a courthouse marriage, U-Hauling it to Miami, and mutually taking out insurance policies that named each other as beneficiary, I had a feeling she had been sidetracked on the way to Happy-Ever-After.

I have a rule against letting a client get too close. What happens with me is sort of the way college coeds fall for their English profs—they're the male who's there, who seems sympathetic. I don't like to use people or be used, but in this case I didn't have much choice. Besides, there were a lot of good reasons not to leave her alone right now.

I sprung for the Golden Cock. Freddie fixed our steaks just the way I liked them, very raw and smothered in onions. While we waited for hers to be cooked some more, she had the house red and me a draft. In the midst of dinner I asked her about her steak and Arthur. What we both realized soon was she didn't know much about him.

"I always thought he turned the conversation to me because I was the center of his life—now I don't know."

On the way back it hit about the same time as the heartburn. They meet at a singles' club in an affluent area of Washington. He seems to have no past. Constantly talks about money. Cuts her off from her family and friends so she becomes totally dependent upon him. "The insurance policies that you took out on each other," I said, "how much were they for?"

"One-hundred-thousand dollars. Why?"

I didn't tell her I thought I knew the winner in this year's Golddigger Sweepstakes. When this whole thing was over, I was going to steal a line from Daddy and tell Tim, "I told you so." This case, like 99% of the ones I handle, was strictly domestic.

When I pulled the Buick back in front of her house, I had decided to play it by ear. My onion-filled gut told me I was in for an evening of discomfort, one way or the other.

I STARED ACROSS THE SILVER-PLATED SERVING TRAY OF fig newtons at Carolyn See. We had gone through a pot of coffee, *The Hollywood Strings Play the Greatest Hits of 1965*, and enough awkward moments of silence to make me feel like a zit-faced kid on his

first date. I was determined to wait till Arthur See returned even if I had to sit through the Hollywood Strings up to 1978.

My blonde companion was hovering about two feet above the orange couch courtesy of the Valium she had popped on one of her trips to the kitchen to refill our coffee cups.

"I can't believe Arthur would hurt me," she giggled in a high-pitched voice that sounded like a little girl who didn't want to come down from her tree house. "He's so gentle."

Suddenly there came a knock. Why would her husband bother, I wondered as I opened the door.

A tanned figure in a manicured beard and mustache stared at me like an ad for a chic styling salon.

"Jack," came Carolyn's voice from behind me, "what are you doing here?"

"You're a hard woman to track down, honey." He stepped past me as if I were a swinging door. "I was in the neighborhood—well, actually the city—and I thought I'd drop by."

They took each other's hands and gazed across time. With her recent change of names and addresses, I doubted Jack Kensington had just dropped by.

Group dynamics is fascinating. Her ex took the chair across from the couch and my favorite coffee cup. I should have known something was up when he passed on the fig newtons. During the small talk his eyes darted around as if he expected someone to jump up from behind the RCA and throw something on his four-hundred-dollar sharkskin suit.

"So this is Arthur," he said finally, getting up and looking at me.

Before she could answer I stuck out my hand and crushed his. "Glad to meet you." I thought it would be easier on all of us if he didn't know who I was and why I was there.

Kensington sat down beside her. "So you still got the old chess set I gave you in Damascus. Did you ever learn to play?" He picked up the black king.

"I learned a lot of things, Jack."

They skated for awhile on the surface of their years together. Both kept falling on the ice. If this had been a movie, the Hollywood Strings would have been playing "It's Over."

Without warning Kensington stood up. "Hey, it's been great, honey, but I got miles to go and all that. Besides, I'm sure a working stiff like Arthur needs his sleep."

He started for the door. I stood up in front of him and said, "Hold it, pal."

"What?"

"Chess is hard enough to play when you have all the pieces."

"What are you talking about, Arthur?"

"The name's Shayne, pal, and I'm talking about this." I reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out the black king.

The front door opened as if on cue, and Arthur, appearing, said, "I'll take that, Shayne."

His request was backed up by a .357. He waved it and said, "I've been waiting four months for this. Crap, what a waste. I was certain she knew where it was." He looked at his surprised wife. "That's right, Carolyn. That's why all the pleas for cash. I thought you'd sell it for money to help your poor, hardworking hubby."

"Sell what?" she said.

"The reason Mr. Antonio's going to promote me to lieutenant." He grabbed the piece from me.

"I doubt it," I said, noting two guys in bad-fitting suits who stood behind him. They looked like they had just escaped from the Bulgarian weightlifting team.

"Nyet," said Papa Bear to his oversized cub, who appeared ready to depopulate the See's living room. "Colonel Illyich can unpack his long underwear. This year no trip will there be to Siberia."

Their laughter was terminated by a graphic demonstration of the domino effect. Daddy Morrow came sprawling through the door and into the KGB houseguests. They struck Arthur, who toppled Kensington. I stepped back as they tumbled to the floor.

I saw the familiar faces and government-issue .45's of Tony Pegas and Jack Jones.

"Family reunions" said Pegas.

Not really wanting to know, I said, "What's going on?

Pegas said, "How many times do we have to tell you, Red, to stick to finding lost puppies?"

"Yeah," said Jones, "you managed to stumble into Operation Roadblock."

"We should have called you off this morning when you phoned us," said Pegas. "The whole op was in place and coming together."

Jones, keeping up his half of the Company vaudeville team, said, "Kensington stole a microdot with the plans for Operation Scimitar."

"The Russian-backed invasion of Lebanon by Syria," I contributed.

"Kensington made contacts with the Syrians when he peddled influence in D.C.," said Pegas. "He was on their good side when he made his timely exit from this country and went to Damascus."

"Wait a minute," I said. "If I don't miss my guess, he used his

connection with his ex-wife to sneak the microdot out of the country." I picked up the black king. The felt underpad was loose, so I peeled it off. A piece of cellophane had been glued there. I tossed it to Pegas. "Checkmate."

Jones picked up the story. "We knew he had the dot, but we couldn't find it, so we asked him to get his wife out of Syria because we had to get him out, and we knew he'd use her Company connection and the diplomatic pouch to insure the safety of the microdot. Then it was just a matter of eyeballing her till he came to retrieve his merchandise."

"And Arthur," I said, "what was his connection?"

"French, you might say," answered Pegas. "The mob found out about the dot. They knew that if they had it, they could blackmail the Syrian government into helping them corner the area poppy market."

"Of course," said Jones, "Boris and Ivan here wanted the dot to save Number 2 Dzhernsky Square the embarrassment at the Middle East peace summit."

"But, Daddy," said Carolyn See, emptying a bottle of Valium into her trembling hand.

"Daddy Warbucks here," said Jones, "would buy and sell his soul if there were a profit to be turned. If Morrow Imports had the dot—and why do you think he's been hanging around—they'd have tremendous leverage for trade concessions."

I looked, but it was too late. Carolyn See had already thrown down the last Valium.

MIAMI'S JET-SET CROWD WAS TRYING TO LAND IN BED before the sunrise when I found a bleary-eyed Tim Rourke hunched in front of the blank screen of his VDT.

"I've tried everything, but my muse must have taken a flyer to Bermuda," he confessed. "Tell me again about that pizzeria stakeout."

There comes a time when friendship has to override principle. Sure, I could have watched him suffer, paid him back for all those outrageous things he had been writing about me, and protected my own self-image. Instead, I said, "Put your hands on the keyboard, pal."

I pulled out a flask of Martell, threw down a shot, fired up a Camel, tugged on my left earlobe, rasped my thumbnail across my stubbled chin, focused my steel-gray eyes on the monitor, and began. "It had been a rough day. My mouth felt the way a rhinoceros' skin looked and champagne never tasted—very dry. I had been tailing some small-time coke dealer . . ."

Ed Gamble's the name and I'm a private detective, formerly of the Milwaukee Police Department. While most of my work is gathering information for the D.A., looking for runaway kids and the like, I do get involved in a murder case once in awhile. There was this Gus Heimer case last year . . .

Death in the Country

by R. TUTTLE

EVERY FALL I TAKE TIME OUT TO VISIT MY KID BROTHER in a tiny hamlet called Stanhope in northern Wisconsin for some hunting. He's editor of the local newspaper and publishes a quarterly titled Wisconsin Life. The town, nestled between two hills of beautiful woodland, has a population of about two thousand, mostly retired people and farmers. There's a main street with a grocery store, two bars, three cafes, a liquor store and various other shops lining the cracked sidewalks. Two wooden churches form the southern entrance

and there's a small grammar school in the center of town. The residential area is scattered about in the surrounding woods. The weather is hot in summer and bitter cold and snowy in winter.

So, as usual, last November, I closed my Milwaukee house and drove out to Stanhope. I'm single, unattached, so this was a minor exercise.

My brother Al and his wife, June live in a picturesque log cabin on a five acre tract of woodland about four miles from the town center. He's tall, slender, ten years younger than my forty-three and quite distinguished looking, even in dungerees and rumpled red shirt. I am short, sort of non-descript, the type who fades into the woodwork at a party—which is actually a help in my particular profession. June is a slim, lovely redhead who probably should be modelling or in the movies but she prefers to help Al with his various literary efforts and work on a novel. They are a fine, loving couple—too damn busy with wordage to give me a nephew or a niece.

The trip to Stanhope takes about six hours so I got there by suppertime and after a terrific meal of fried chicken and baked potatoes, Al and I settled down in front of the fireplace with coffee. While three logs burned merrily in the fireplace, a cold Fall wind howled around the cabin which consisted of three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a large kitchen, a dining room, living room and Al's office. Some log cabin!

Al seemed very thoughtful as he stared at the fire over the rim of his coffee cup. Finally, he spoke. "I wonder who killed Gus Heimer."

"Gus Heimer? The town fixit man?" I shrugged. "I didn't know he was dead."

Al eyed me for an instant. "You don't read the paper I send you every week?"

I grinned. "Frankly, I get very little time to read anything but reports, Al. I guess I missed this issue. What's the story?"

"A week ago Tuesday, Gus was found shot to death in his shop and his cash register had been rifled. About two hours later, Eli Wallace, one of the town's minor criminals, was caught trying to cash a check in Pinewood, a check written to Gus so our aging police chief, Miley Benson clapped him in jail and closed the case."

For the record, Miley Benson was a fat, jolly man who in his youth had been a pretty good state cop but since the age of forty-eight had been in a sort of semi-retirement in Stanhope where crime—with the exception of Heimer's death—was usually limited to petty theft and extra-curricular activities of some of the bored town youth. Oh—if pushed, he could be firm but he'd rather just sit in his warm office and play cards with his assistant, a young, nice enough fellow named Ole

Carr who would rather be out fooling around with the town girls than engage in upholding the law.

Heimer had been somewhat of a mystery man since his arrival in Stanhope in 1946 from England. He was from Germany originally, had performed some role in World War 2 for the Allies and was probably the best fixit man in the United States. He had set up a small repair shop in town with the slogan, "I CAN FIX ANYTHING"—and he could! Ever since 1946 he had kept kitchen gadgets, radios, TV sets—you name it—in perfect running order for the town citizens. He was closemouthed about his past however. I remember taking one of June's toasters into his crowded shop the previous year. He was a short, powerful looking man with a mass of gray hair and a Santa Claus beard. As a matter of fact, he had played Santa Claus on several Christmas occasions.

"What makes you think that Eli didn't shoot him?" I asked.
"People do funny things some times when they need money."

"Okay," Al said. "Eli is a thief, a complete bust as a citizen. He claims he walked in to get a cup of coffee—Gus always had a pot brewing—and saw Gus on the floor. He thought he was drunk because Gus occasionally went on a binge. He also spotted all that money in the cash register and grabbed a handful and left." Al shrugged. "I believe him."

I remembered Eli, a broken down drunk whose main claim to fame had been a successful evasion of the draft during the Korean War.

"What kind of a gun was used?"

Al pointed a long, slender forefinger at me. "That is another odd aspect to this case—the gun. Gus was shot twice in the back of the head and the bullets gave the county lab fits. They can't figure out what kind of gun they came from. Except, they say that it may have come from one of those small pistols that ladies sometimes carry in their purses."

I smiled. "Any new, mysterious ladies come to town recently?" I finished my coffee. "Hey, kid—you trying to get me in on this case?"

"No. I just thought you'd be interested—since you didn't read my news item about it." He stuffed tobacco into his pipe. "How about some hunting tomorrow? We'll go up on the north ridge."

"Yeah—sure," I said. "Did Eli ever fool around with guns?"

"He was a draft dodger. Remember? As far as I know, Eli has never pulled a trigger of any gun."

I nodded. "How about Heimer's relatives?"

"The county is trying to find some now."

June walked in at that moment looking absolutely marvelous in duggarees, checkered wool shirt and bare feet. She grinned at me.

"Trapped into the case yet, Ed?" she asked. "If somebody doesn't do something, one of our most colorful characters, Elie Wallace will be put in the slammer for something he may not have done. Miley has trouble finding his car keys, much less a killer."

I sat back and sighed. "Tell you what, I'll offer some advice. After all, I'm not really a cop."

"I am—of sorts," Al said. "I'm a reserve cop or something like that. I help with the paper work, take pictures, take care of getting samples to the lab—all for nothing."

"That's my brother," I said. "Getting into everything."

"Tell me about it," June said dryly. "How about a scotch and soda, Ed?"

"Right on," I said. "Al, have you gone over Heimer's personal stuff?"

"No. He does have a desk full of papers."

"Why don't we go over there in the morning," I suggested, "and go through the desk?"

All grinned. "You're on. Now that that's settled, I have some writing to do for the paper." He rose.

"How about a game of chess?" June asked me.

I shrugged. "I'll only beat you."

She handed me a scotch and soda. "I'm getting better so watch out."

So to the tune of Al's typewriter and the wind outside, June and I went at each other over the chess board.

AROUND NINE THE NEXT MORNING, AL AND I WENT TO Heimer's shop which was a good example of controlled disarray, the typical abode of a genius with a screw driver. The workbench along one wall was littered with tools, parts of household gadgets, electric coils, resistors, radio tubes, a few transistors, a small TV set—only old Gus could have put all that stuff back together.

A battered coffee pot with its plug hanging floorward stood silently on a small table brooding over a coffee can half filled with sugar, a dirty spoon and a jar of instant cream. In the middle of the litter on the workbench stood a cup half filled with coffee. I gingerly stuck my finger in it and found it cold.

Al pointed to the wall to my left. "Gus was found there—on the floor along the wall."

"Any ideas about the time of death?"

"The County Doc figured Gus had been dead for about eight or nine hours when he was found by Sal Matson, the barber next door. He came in around eight o'clock for his usual cup of coffee and chat with

Gus."

"Who's on the other side?"

"Hugo Kepler, the druggist."

The guy who runs the gun club?"

"Yes. He came to town about two years ago."

"I see." I paused. "It must have happened around midnight on Monday. Is it easy to get in the shop?"

"Yes. Gus kept irregular hours. Sometimes he'd be open until two in the morning working on something. Besides, the front door lock wouldn't work."

I smiled. "Gus could fix everything but his own lock. Does Kepler still have his gun club?"

"Very much so. Gus's desk is in his living quarters in the back."

I followed him through a rear doorway and into a combination bedroom, kitchen and general purpose room. There was a closet sized john to my right. There was a small, unmade bed along the wall, an electric stove in the corner next to a refrigerator and a sink along another wall. The sink was full of dirty dishes and a small table in the center held the remains of a supper of soup and rolls. The soup bowl was half full and there was a partially eaten roll next to the bowl.

"It looks to me," I said, "like he knew the killer because the killer must have come in the back door—or perhaps the front and maybe they talked for a few minutes. Then, they went into the shop."

"Motive?" asked Al.

"One thing at a time, kid. The motive escapes me at the moment." I saw the old fashioned rolltop desk next to the john. There must have been a thirty year collection of paper jammed into that old relic. The top, save for an ancient typewriter, was completely full of letters, notes, ads—the mess was far worse than the mess on my desk which is bad enough.

"Gus was not the neatest guy in the world," Al remarked. "Why don't you take one side of the desk and I'll take the other."

I nodded and pulled up a chair. Al took the other chair and we plowed through the papers for several minutes in silence. My side yielded only letters to vendors, letters from vendors, ads—a couple dating back to the fifties—scribbled notes in German—the whole business was beginning to bore me when Al held up an old looseleaf notebook.

"This looks interesting," he said. "It's eight pages of German—something Gus was writing."

Al's job during his Army stint was in Communications. He had been stationed in Germany and could hold his own with the language.

"Got to it, Herr Gamble," I grinned.

"Yah." He studied the first page. "Frankly, I'm somewhat rusty in German but here goes."

"I, Klaus Buchen, was born in Berlin, Germany on May 9, 1920, the youngest son of a family of five. My father was a successful engineer and my two older brothers became doctors. Being a latecomer to our family, I was eighteen years old in 1938 and my brothers were gone from our household as practicing Doctors. So, it was just Father, Mother and I in our small house on the outskirts of the city. Hitler was rising to power in Germany and we were Jewish. But I thought little about Hitler in those days as my school and soccer kept me busy. I was going to be the world's greatest soccer player!"

"One night in late 38, I arrived home to find my mother and father gone and the house ransacked. I tried to call my brothers but they were gone also. Then, a neighbor told me that soldiers had come to our house and taken my parents away in a police truck. I was frantic! What should I do? I had never been faced with this before. I finally found a local policeman, a fat man named Schneider.

"He said there was nothing I could do—except possibly, flee. All suspicious looking Jewish families were to be arrested. Suspicious? What had my family done? My mother had been working part time for a local newspaper—writing food recipes. She had been so proud of her little job. The newspaper had not been pro Hitler, so it had been put out of business and all the employees considered enemies of the state. For a few tasty dishes, my family had been put into a concentration camp! Before I could flee, I was caught and taken directly to a concentration camp on a crowded, filthy freight car. We were a frightened, confused lot of souls jammed into that car with no food or water and little air.

"I quickly learned upon arrival at the camp that my family had already perished in the gas chamber—efficient, these Nazi devils! I was overcome by a violent hatred of Hitler and his squads of murderers and vowed that I would escape this death camp and return to haunt them.

"I was young and strong so I somehow managed to stay alive and reasonably healthy for the next few months. In order to maintain one's self, one had to ignore the horrible suffering going on sometimes inches away and most important, to be a thief and a con man. I finally managed to con my way into a job cleaning the officers' quarters. There was always scraps of food, liquor and cigarettes to steal. There I met Hans Richter and Otto Heim. Both worked at the Commandant's headquarters next door fixing plumbing, electrical problems and other odd jobs. Every night we met in a small storehouse and planned our

escape, finally coming up with a master plan.

"In back of the Commandant's headquarters there was a high, electrified fence. One hand on that fence would bring the guards streaming out of the barracks. My job was to turn off the generator that supplied electricity to the camp. The powerhouse was nearby. I had mopped the floors in there, cleaned the windows and as a janitor, had the run of the building.

"The instant the power was turned off, Hans would cut a hole in the fence with a pair of wire cutters he had hidden for just an occasion. Otto had stolen two pistols from officers' quarters so his job was to stand by and shoot any guard who tried to stop us. Such a simple plan! Huddled together in the tiny storehouse, we went over it and over it until there were some nights I actually thought we had carried out the plan already. We talked and waited for the right moment and it came on Christmas Eve, 1938. Dear reader, what were you doing on Christmas Eve, 1938? We were planning violence.

"I had stolen a bottle of whiskey from the officer's mess and had buried it for safe keeping. It seems that the night guard at the power house was an alcoholic—and loved to drink himself into oblivion. Santa was going to give him a present of a bottle of good whiskey.

"The twenty-fourth of December was a cold, miserable day and several hundred hapless families were unloaded from freight cars and jammed into the death camp. The guards and their officers were very busy.

"By eleven o'clock that night, most of the officers were either bedded down with their women or drinking at the club while the enlisted men were relaxing with beer. At eleven thirty, I took my bottle of whiskey over to the powerhouse and left it where the guard could see it. He had had many beers so he just needed a push over the brink. I waited. By ten minutes of twelve, he had drank half the bottle and was a soggy mass of humanity on the floor. I waited a few minutes, signalled my partners, then pulled the main switch. After cutting a few wires to make certain that the power wouldn't return for awhile—I had already dismantled the emergency power source—I ran to the fence where Han's had completed half the job. Otto stood by nervously with his pistols.

"Hans had just cut his last wire when two guards suddenly appeared. Otto got them both before they could raise their guns. While Otto and Hans darted through the hole in the fence, I grabbed one of the automatic rifles dropped by a guard and backed through—a good thing too—because six guards appeared. I aimed and as they say in the gangster movies, wasted them. Then, I went through the fence and the

three of us quickly headed for the woods.

"We said nothing as we ran through the heavy brush. Otto was familiar with the countryside so we followed him. Somehow, we had to make it to France! As we glanced back we could see flashlights and men with guns flowing through our hole in the fence. We had been lucky so far but the worst was ahead. It was a dark night and travel was difficult through the woods. None of us had ever celebrated Christmas but we did that night by wishing each other a Merry Christmas."

AL STOPPED READING AND LOOKED AT ME. "THAT'S AS far as he got." He shook his head. "What a story."

"I guess he made it to France," I remarked. I was beginning to feel frustrated. I was convinced that Eli hadn't killed Heimer—or Buchen—but who had? And why. As Al continued to search through the desk, I rose and began to wander somewhat aimlessly around—first to the back room, then in the shop. My mind agonized for some good ideas. I had the feeling that his death, somehow, had something to do with his past. "Al!" I called. "Are you going to find out the rest of his story?"

"You bet—if I have to go to Washington."

The shop door opened slowly and a tall man smoking a fancy curved pipe peered in. "Oh—I saw the lights and—who are you?"

"Ed Gamble, and you?"

"Oh yes—our editor's brother. You are a private detective, I believe. I'm Hugo Kepler from the drug store next door."

Kepler was a trim looking man around my age with a narrow face, sharp features and a small, well kept mustache. He was wearing a waist-length jacket, heavy duty trousers and cloth hat—the uniform of the day in Wisconsin this time of year.

He didn't offer to shake hands.

I nodded. "How's your gun club doing?"

"Fine."

"How well did you know Gus?" I asked.

He shrugged. "As well and anybody. He kept my freezer running, I suppose you are playing detective. Has Wallace confessed yet?"

"No," I said. "And I'm not so sure he shot Heimer."

"You may have a point," Kepler answered. "I don't think Wallace would have the guts to shoot anybody—unless he was too drunk to know what he was doing." He looked beyond me and smiled. "Good morning, Al. Looking for a story for your—paper?"

Al looked slightly irked. It was obvious he didn't care much for Kepler. "If I run one, I'll print it."

"Good for you." Kepler frowned. "Let's see—you are connected with our sterling police department, aren't you?"

"Vaguely."

"And I suppose you and your brother are investigating Heimer's death."

I broke into the conversation. "Just gathering up some loose ends. And there seems to be quite a few in this case. Gus was shot around midnight last Monday." I paused. "You didn't happen to be in your store then, did you? I'm looking for somebody who might have heard a shot."

Kepler frowned at the question, then shook his head. "I close at six."

"I see. Just thought you might have heard something."

As I spoke, I suddenly noticed something on the floor near the corner of the shop—right where Heimer's body was found. It was a black scribble that looked something like an S. I knelt down and examined it closely and saw that it was indeed an S. Heimer must have tried to write down his killer's name just before he died. I looked at Al. "S—who did he know whose name began with S?"

Al joined me on the floor. "I'll be damned—how about that—Let's see—lots of S's in town."

Kepler laughed. "You two are dreaming. This shop is full of marks on the floor, the walls—some of them have been there for twenty years." He turned and walked out.

"He's right." Al said.

I rubbed my finger on the edge of the S—the black came off. "This one's fresh. How about taking a picture of it?"

"Sure."

I rose. "Tell me about Kepler."

"He came to Stanhope about two years ago and took over the drugstore. He evidently has money because he also bought the Woodside estate where he has his gun club. He's single and has a small home just on the other side of town but he seems to spend most of his time out at the club."

"And the gun club is for hunters?" To learn about guns—safety?"

"Supposedly."

"There's something else?" I asked.

"I tried to do an article on the club and wasn't even allowed on the grounds. I hear they have a secret room, open only to members in good standing."

"Para-military outfit maybe?"

He shrugged. "Could be."

I rose to my feet. "I got a hunch—a crazy one but—who knows—?"

Why don't you follow up on Heimer's—Buchen's—background, and I'll visit the gun club."

He nodded. "I'll start with the FBI office in the capital. The best way to go to the gun club is to take the back road to Pinewood, park at the Miller farm and hike along the creek. You'll come to the fence surrounding the gun club. There will probably be some hunters around so be careful."

I glanced at my watch. "I'm going this afternoon."

"Take a rifle with you."

"No—this is a photo hunt," I said. "Let's go over to the cafe and grab a cup of coffee and I'll be on my way."

"Take the jeep."

ACCORDINGLY, ABOUT AN HOUR LATER I WAS RACING down the winding, tar road toward Pinewood. The road snaked through woods, past old picture post card farms and vast stretches of meadowland. It was cold and the noon sun seemed subdued, masked somewhat by a gray sky. I had my Contax and a couple of lenses, a thermos of hot coffee and some good Wisconsin sharp cheese to nibble on.

I arrived in Pinewood at one and pulled up in front of the tiny town's one cafe, a decrepit looking building jammed in between a general store and a gas station. There were a few people wandering around but I was ignored as I walked into the cafe.

Inside, there was a counter, stools and two tables with mismatched chairs. A pot bellied stove threw out heat from the middle of the room. I was the only patron and the tall, dour man behind the counter eyed me curiously.

He finally nodded. "You're Al Gamble's brother."

"Right," I grinned. "How'd you know?"

"Seen you hunting here last year. Want a cup of coffee?"

I nodded. "Yeah—and one of those doughnuts."

He brought me the coffee and the doughnut. "Out for some more hunting?"

"No, just for a hike—to get in shape."

"Down along the creek?"

"Maybe." I had the odd feeling that I was being quizzed, so I finished my coffee and doughnut quickly and left.

Anson Miller, a tall, spare gentleman was puffing on a pipe and cleaning out a chicken coop when I parked in his yard. He finally remembered me.

"How's the detective business?" he asked with a grin.

"It's a living," I grinned.

"Sometimes I got to be a detective to find these eggs in here—damn hens leave them all over the place."

I laughed. At least, all eggs looked alike. "See you in a couple of hours, Anson."

THE CREEK, DOWN TO A TRICKLE OF WATER IN WINTER, was a pleasant, pebbly path winding through cold beauty of the woods in a seemingly aimless manner. I had my pack strapped on my back, camera bag hanging by my side and was in high spirits as I strode along. Occasionally, a deer would cross my path and I saw two foxes. The only sounds were my shoes crunching on the pebbles and an icy wind blowing through the trees.

Suddenly, there was the sharp report of a rifle and a bullet whizzed by me, burying itself in a pine tree.

I flattened myself against a rock and waited for another shot but there was none. Perhaps some hunter had mistaken me for a deer. What else? I waited for several minutes before proceeding.

The shot had come from my left. I decided to finish my hike in the wooded area and make my own trail.

There were no more shots so I dismissed the close call as simply a wild shot—at least, the practical side of me did. That section of my brain devoted to the curious aspects of life still pondered the wild bullet as I plowed through the underbrush.

I reached the tall, meshed wire fence which was covered on the inside by a heavy canvas. There was a big sign attached to the wire. PRIVATE PROPERTY—KEEP OUT.

In my business it doesn't make for success to pay much attention to warning signs so I immediately cut a round hole in the canvas and took a look. It did indeed look like some kind of military post—a boot camp. A squad of men in fatigues were marching back and forth, shouted at by a short man in a heavy coat and fur hat. As marchers, they were pretty bad but they seemed to be serious about it. In back of the marchers there was an obstacle course. Three men seemed to be giving it a try. Several other men were going through the manual of arms with rifles.

Next to the training field there was a huge mansion with a long white porch, formerly the summer home of Wallace Woodside, a banker who died in the thirties. The house was a three story building, well kept and there was smoke coming out of one of the chimneys.

I attached my long range lens to the camera and after enlarging the hole in the canvas, took several shots of the activities. It was a clear

day, some sun, and I had fast film, so I figured the pictures should turn out satisfactorily.

After taking my pictures, I sat back and had my coffee and sandwiches as I continued to watch the activity inside the fence. What to do now?

As I sat pondering my next move, a tall figure appeared at the front door of the mansion. He was wearing a heavy coat, cloth hat and smoking a curved pipe. Kepler. I watched him closely as he shouted something to the drill instructor and to the men on the obstacle course. They all quit what they were doing and lined up in front of the porch.

Just like in the army. I finished my coffee and stuffed the remains of my cheese in my pack. Kepler seemed to be pointing in my general direction. It was obviously some sort of an alert and perhaps I was the cause.

A few minutes later, the line of men broke up and ran into the mansion, returning a little later armed with rifles. I decided to get out of there. If they were searching for me, they would skirt the fence first.

Common sense told me that the woods would soon be full of men with rifles and I was liable to be shot—so why not let them capture me? I wanted to see the secret room. Accordingly, I walked quickly along the fence until I came to a narrow dirt road that led to a small building by the main gate. There was an elderly man sitting inside drinking coffee and reading a magazine. An instant later men with rifles began streaming out the gate. I ducked back into the bushes and let them run by me. Seconds later, they all broke for the woods.

I stepped out on the dirt road and walked up to the guard house. The man stared at me.

"Where did you come from?" He touched the revolver at his side nervously. "They're looking for you."

"My? Why? I got cold and just dropped in for a cup of coffee. Is Kepler in?"

He took a deep breath and picked up the telephone. "Hey, Mike—I got that spy here in the guard house. Yeah—captured him myself."

"Maybe you'll get a medal," I said, smiling.

"It ain't funny—you're in deep trouble. The—Kepler don't like people snooping around." He pulled out his revolver.

"Make it good," I said.

"In a couple of minutes, you won't be laughing," he warned.

Two men with rifles appeared at the gate. They were both young and grim looking as they eyed me. One spoke. "Is he armed?"

"Gee—." The guard hastily searched me and my backpack. "Nothing but a camera."

"Don't forget the cheese," I said.

One of the guards studied me for an instant. "Perhaps you think this is a joke—." he motioned toward the mansion. "March." A gun was poked in my ribs.

"Look," I said, "I just came by to bum a cup of coffee."

"And cut a hole in our fence," the guard said.

We walked to the porch and into the front room where I found Kepler standing by a large fireplace. The room was comfortable looking with several easy chairs, a bookcase full of books and a long table.

Kepler was wearing a long black coat. His face was expressionless, eyes narrowed. "Good work, men."

"They didn't do anything," I said. "The old guy at the gate captured me."

The two guards glared at me but before they could respond Kepler held up his hand. "You two may leave now."

"Yes, general," said one, and they left.

I smiled. "You're a general?"

He smiled. "Won't you join us?" He nodded toward a door marked PRIVATE. "We are having a meeting."

The secret room? "Glad to."

"Perhaps you will change your mind," he said, leading me to the door. He turned the knob and pushed the door open. Then, he gently nudged me into the next room.

THE FIRST THING I SAW WAS A LARGE PICTURE OF ADOLF Hitler on one wall over a fireplace. The dreaded Nazi Swastikas were draped on the wall on both sides of the picture and the rest of the wall space around the room was decorated with Nazi banners and flags. There were six desks, three along each long wall with sober faced men in brown uniforms sitting in silence. Along the wall opposite Hitler's picture there was a large glass-topped desk.

A sign on the desk read GENERAL KEPLER.

I couldn't resist a grin. "General of what?" I glanced at him.

He had taken off his coat and was wearing a crisp military uniform with the swastika armband. "You find humor here? We are quite serious, Gamble. You are not in your country at the moment. You have trespassed—violated the borders of this outpost of the Third Reich. Furthermore, you have been spying. Taking pictures." He turned to a young, tense looking man at one of the desks. "Remove the pack and search it, Uber."

Uber followed ordered quickly—efficiently and soon all of the

contents of the pack were laying out on one of the desks.

I was finding it difficult to believe that something like this could go on the heartland of the United States. These people were either dead serious or living in a tiny fantasy world. "Kepler, you are as nutty as one of my aunt's brownies."

The general's face reddened and he drew a gun from the side holster. "You will pay for your crimes against the State and for your insolence."

"What did Heimer pay for?" I asked.

He smiled. "I overheard your brother's translation of Heimer's literary effort—his lies about some mythical concentration camp—."

"Eight million people can't be wrong, Kepler," I said.

"Lies! they're all lies!" His voice rose. "Heimer—or Buchen—was a criminal! An enemy of the State!" His voice dropped to more confidential tones. "My grandfather was an aide to our glorious leader—." He glanced at the picture of the paperhanger. "You would like to know the rest of Buchen's sordid story? I'll tell you. He escaped from prison and after murdering eight of our brave soldiers on the Czech border, escaped to France and then to England."

"Good for him," I commented, realizing suddenly that my hunch about Kepler had been right.

Kepler, intent upon making a speech, appeared to ignore my comment.

"In England," continued Kepler, "Buchen was trained by the British to be a spy and an espionage agent." Anger had turned his face into a hate mask. "He was dropped back into Germany where he posed as a farmer, a peasant, an engineer. He took on all sorts of roles in order to carry out destruction of our factories, trains—to keep the British informed of our troop movements—a diabolical man!"

"Sounds pretty clever to me," I said.

Kepler, who was lost in his world for a moment, again ignored my comment. "Our great leader personally ordered Buchen killed on sight." He pulled a piece of paper out of an inside coat pocket. "I have a copy of that order in his own handwriting."

"So you carried out the order and killed Gus Heimer."

"I killed Klaus Buchen—spy and criminal." He smiled suddenly. "With a gun belonging to our glorious leader, I might add. Nice touch, don't you think, Gamble?"

"Fits right into the script," I said. "Now what? My brother knows I'm out here."

"Our justice is swift and to the point," he said. "You have been tried and found guilty of spying. The penalty for spying is death. You will be

killed by one of our hunting rifles and taken out to the creek bed. There, you will be found—a victim of an accidental shot of some careless hunter."

I looked around at the men at the desks. "Are you going to go along with this? Can't you see he's crazy?"

Their stoney silence gave consent. They were like robots.

Kepler laughed. "It isn't so funny now, is it? And as we expand our power, the rest of the country will take us seriously."

I began to sweat some. No idle threat, this. I looked around for a way out—some ideas—then spotted a can of lighter fluid on the floor in front of the fireplace. It was the type of fluid campers use.

I had to keep Kepler talking, something he seemed to enjoy, especially when he was talking about himself. "I'm curious. How did you manage to find Buchen in this country?"

"Five years ago, my grandfather died in Berlin. I was at his side and he gave me the written order for Buchen's execution. I swore I would find this criminal and carry out the order. It took three years to trace him to Wisconsin and finally to Stanhope. The rest was simple." He smiled. "I am quite clever—yes?"

"You'll do." While he talked, I had been edging toward the fireplace, holding out my hands in front of the fire as though to warm them. "My brother will never go for that accidental killing bit, Kepler. He'll blow your little country wide open." I was within reach of the lighter fluid.

"I don't think so," Kepler said. "You see, within ten minutes we can transform this room into a simple recreation room."

"How about a drink?" I asked. "For the condemned man. Scotch."

Kepler shrugged. "Why not—you are quite clever in your own way and I admire clever men." He went to his desk, pulled out a bottle out of a drawer, poured two drinks into shot glasses and walked slowly down to where I was standing. He handed me one of the glasses.

I glanced down at the lighter fluid. The startling thought that it might be empty crossed my mind. That was a chance I had to take.

I took a sip of the scotch, then suddenly splattered his eyes with the drink. Moving fast, I grabbed the fluid, pulled off the cap and drenched Kepler with the fluid. Luck was on my side. It had been full.

Then, as Kepler clutched at his eyes, I grabbed his gun.

"One move from anyone," I said, "and Kepler becomes a torch."

No one moved.

"And," I went on, "all hands are to be kept on the desks."

They obeyed.

Shoving Kepler ahead of me, I went to the telephone on his desk.

"Look, Gamble," he pleaded. "This was just a gag—I—"

"Quiet." I called my brother at his office. After I had hung up, I smiled at him. "Have a seat at your desk—general."

He sat down and I stood in the center of the Third Reich and waited for the police.

JUSTICE MOVED SWIFTLY. AFTER WE PRESENTED THE court with the murder gun and Hitler's execution order, Kepler's supermen staff fell apart and talked loud and clear in an effort to disassociate themselves from Kepler's organization. As for Kepler, he confessed killing Heimer and a few days after his confession, announced in his jail cell that he was actually Adolf Hitler.

"By the way," Al asked me after things had returned to normal in Stanhope. "What made you go after Kepler?"

"Heimer's background, the S on the floor and Kepler himself. I guess old Gus wasn't a very good artist because he was trying to draw a picture of a swastika and came up with something resembling an S before he died."

"And Kepler?"

I shrugged. "He looked like Hitler."

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

Pamela Sue Martin was Nancy Drew in the television series. Who portrayed the youthful detective in movies of the late thirties?

Bonita Granville.

What was the first story written about Sherlock Holmes?

A STUDY IN SCARLET by A. Conan Doyle, originally published in Beeton's Christmas Annual in 1887.

Who was the first actor to portray Philip Marlowe on the screen?

Dick Powell in MURDER, MY SWEET (1944), based on Raymond Chandler's novel FAREWELL, MY LOVE (1940).

"I'm going to kill you," he whispered to himself as he raised the binoculars to look at his intended victim. Then he gasped. The man in the other building had binoculars—and was looking back at him!

My Victim, My Killer

by EDWARD W. LUDWIG

THURSDAY, 10:47 A.M.

At exactly that moment Oliver Wilbeck decided he must kill the moon-faced man.

It was a dying-summer day when a gray haze covered the sky and a rising wind held exploring tendrils of winter.

He sat facing his bookkeeper's desk-world of typewriter, columnar pads, ten-key adding machine, invoices and envelopes, flanked on his right by file cabinets, beyond the desk and behind him a narrow aisle canyoned by more cabinets. In a sense, he was alone and isolated, for the current volume of work and number of employees had long ago outgrown the limited space.

But to the left of his desk was the Window. Beyond the air-bubbled pane, beyond the concrete ledge with its pigeon droppings, was the world of Outside.

Now, he thought, *it's time to look, time to try the binoculars.* He arched his head and looked. No one was in the aisle who might see him.

He reached for the lower drawer of his desk, hesitated.

First, he let his gaze curve slowly toward that larger world outside, travel across the city street with its slow and spotty morning traffic, the scattering of pedestrians—sparse enough so that each walker seemed an

individual intent on some private and important mission with no recognition of other insect members of the human hive.

His gaze came to rest on the faded wooden sign on the roof across the street: ATLAS HOTEL: ROOMS BY DAY, WEEK OR MONTH. The corners of his mouth tightened. He was hesitant about glancing at the second-story hotel widow directly across from him, both afraid that the moon-faced man might not be there—and afraid that he would be.

His vision caught a flash of whiteness, a suggestion of movement. It was like seeing a dim star by looking at it not directly but slightly to one side.

Oliver smiled. The moon-faced man was at his window. The man he was going to kill was there.

"I'm going to kill you," he whispered almost inaudibly, delighting in the formation of the words on his lips, the vocalization and crystalization of his determination. "Do you hear me? Do you feel my vibrations? So help me, I'm going to kill you—soon."

Obviously, the man didn't notice him. Only the outlines of the round face and broad shoulders were visible, framed in his open window. He merely sat—Oliver assumed he was sitting—staring outward and downward and from side to side, as always.

The big, white bald head of the moon-faced man jerked down. His massive body hunkered forward—almost obscenely, it seemed to Oliver. He appeared to be watching someone or something intently.

"Now what are you looking at?" Oliver said silently, his lips moving. "A pretty girl? Are you thinking, 'Boy, I'd like to grab her and make love to her'? Or at that boy on the corner? Are you thinking, 'I could kidnap him, then throw him into a vacant lot'?"

The big man's eyes were not discernible from this distance. But he apparently wore glasses that occasionally flashed when he leaned forward, glittering like tiny bright telescopes in the sunlight. And he smoked cigars or cigarettes constantly. Wisps of smoke curled up from the window's bottom.

The actions of the moon-faced man were the same as those of yesterday, of the day before yesterday, of last year, watching, nothing-sitting, of dark, obscene, rats-in-a-sewer observation.

The man would leave his room at times, probably to eat in some cheap restaurant. Oliver, though never positive about his identification, would see a large, round, flabby-looking bald man lumbering to or from the hotel. The man's gait was slow, stiff-legged, and he appeared to have a slight limp. He never wore his glasses when away from the hotel, but a cigar was omnipresent. A few seconds after re-entering the hotel's dismal entrance, his moon-face would again appear at the

window.

Oliver raised his binoculars—which he'd bought solely for this purpose. He adjusted the focus. His hands trembled ever so slightly. He looked:

There! The moon-faced man was there, suddenly appearing so large he might have been a giant.

Suddenly Oliver froze. It was as if a thousand frosty mice feet had scampered over his body. Only his eyes moved, widening with both surprise and terror.

The moon-faced man was *not* wearing glasses. He, too, was looking through binoculars.

And he was looking at Oliver Wilbeck.

OLIVER, HANDS SHAKING, LOWERED HIS BINOCULARS. Whew! Time for a deep breath. Then his momentary surprise and terror faded, replaced by a surge of anger. The idiot! The damned idiot! Madman! Watching out a second-story window through binoculars! Daring to watch him, Oliver Wilbeck!

In a great burst of defiance he rose from his chair and threw open the window. Papers on his desks rattled under the incoming breeze. Poised over his chair, half standing, palms braced on his desktop, he glared at the moon-faced man.

"That settles it," he whispered. "I'm really going to kill you!"

Footsteps behind him, in the aisle.

"Wilbeck! Watch out for that wind! You've got papers all over the floor!"

Oliver jerked. A fresh chill skittered down his spine. "Gosh, Mr. Donovan, you scared me."

"Sorry," said Mr. Donovan, his boss, a small man whose small eyes and large nose seemed always to be pointing at one in accusation. "I know it's a little stuffy back here sometimes. But I stopped, Ollie, to ask about this evening. Have any plans?"

Oliver settled back in his chair, looking up innocently. "Well, yes. I'd planned to spend some time with my hobbies—a little painting, maybe get out the telescope and do some observing before the weather gets too cloudy. I also had possible plans for a date."

Mr. Donovan rubbed his chin. "I realize you're busy with your hobbies and all that. But tonight, Ollie, we've got to get those reports out for Bering Steel. Shouldn't take too much time. You can still get away for some painting or a date. Okay? I won't forget it."

Glumly, Oliver nodded. "Sure, Mr. Donovan. Be glad to."

"I won't forget it."

I WON'T FORGET IT.

Oliver had heard those words as many times as he'd seen the moon-faced man in the window. Never a mention of overtime pay, of a raise, of time off from work. Just, *I won't forget it.*

He smiled grimly. At least Mr. Donovan seemed to believe his lies. Painting? He hadn't touched his paints or canvas in a year. Telescope? A boyhood dream. The closest thing to a telescope was the binoculars he'd bought at a pawnshop to watch the moon-faced man.

Date? Financially, he was in the hamburger-and-coke stage. Physically, he was a balding, grayish blob of obscurity. But he had a job, and being over forty, he supposed it was better these days to be underpaid than not be paid at all.

No, tonight, like every other night after working, he'd shuffle home, physically exhausted, mentally depleted, a dry well, a fragile and empty eggshell ready for a small meal and sleep.

His eyes shifted toward the window across the street and to the glint of binocular lenses—those of the moon-faced man. Why couldn't *he* somehow work on the Bering Steel accounts? But he must have money already. How else could he exist? Perhaps he received charity, a pension, welfare, all taken from the working citizens like himself!

Oliver's hands began to shake with rage. Money and freedom and especially *time*. The moon-faced man had all of these, and he not only murdered them; he castrated them. He made a mockery of Oliver's entire way of life, his very existence. He was the Enemy. And that was why he must be killed.

THURSDAY, 9:50 P.M.

Oliver's work was finished. All the Bering Steel accounts and invoices and payments had been properly checked, rechecked, debited, credited, totaled, collated, summarized and rechecked.

Mr. Donovan smiled. "Good work. See you tomorrow bright and early."

God, how he hated those words: *Bright and early!*

He shuffled bleary-eyed to his '72 Ford in the parking lot only three buildings to his right. In the glow from the lot's only electric light, he fumbled for the proper key, inserted it in the car's door lock.

Odd. The door was already unlocked. He must have forgotten to lock it this morning. Maybe his thoughts had been too full of swarming hatred of the moon-faced man. Possible.

He opened the door and seated himself in the driver's seat. Yow! That smell! He sniffed and sniffed. He gagged. It was like cigar smoke. The car's windows had been closed. It wasn't exhaust from other cars

in the lot, which were now long gone. No, it was cigar smoke.

Not cigarette smoke. He could tell the difference. It was the heavy, thick odor of *cigar* smoke. And moon-faced man smoked cigars.

Puzzled, he inserted the key in the ignition, pressed the gas throttle. There was a low humming. He hesitated before shifting from neutral to forward.

More humming. A sizzling. A crackling. A puff of smoke spiraled up from the hood, like genie bottle-smoke not materializing but dissipating.

He lowered both front windows to clear out the smoke. Then he slid out of the car and fumbled with the hood's latch. He knew little about engines, but at least he could see if a wire was obviously loose.

He raised the hood.

Pooooff!

It was more like a great puff than an explosion. But the sound and pressure were strong enough to shake and rattle the car, loud enough to alarm the sole parking lot attendant who came running.

Smoke was still trickling up from the engine when the police squad car arrived and, soon, the members of a bomb squad.

Lt. Maxwell, big and rock-faced and in plain clothes, with two uniformed policemen, removed something from the engine. An explosive device, they called it.

The lieutenant turned to Oliver. "Yes, a bomb, rigged to explode when your auto started—and a mighty crude one at that. Bad wiring, no dynamite. Just gunpowder, and not enough of that. Certainly not professional. More of a high school freshman's concept of a bomb."

"You think kids did it?"

The lieutenant shook his head. "Can't see why kids would try such an elaborate trick. Is there anyone who might have a grudge against you? Any enemies who'd possibly like you dead or injured? Have you had any bad words with anyone?"

Enemies? Oliver shivered, partly with the evening coolness, partly at the terrible realization that hit him.

But he hesitated. He *could* say, "Yes, there's a man who looks at me through a window in the place where he lives. A bald-headed man who smokes cigars. I know he was watching me through binoculars because I was watching him, too, with binoculars . . . No, I don't know his name. I don't know anything about him."

Damned nut, the lieutenant would say.

Instead, Oliver said, "I'm sure I smelled cigar smoke when I opened the car door. And the door was unlocked."

Lt. Maxwell stuck his head inside the car. He sniffed. "Can't smell

anything."

"No, I opened both the front windows to clear out the smoke."

"Well, whoever placed that bomb could have had a locksmith's key or jimmied the lock. You could have imagined the smoke. You don't have any more guesses about an enemy?"

Oliver said quietly, "No, Officer."

There were photos and more questions.

After a time, one of the officers said, "Okay, fellow, your car's ready. Try starting it."

At 11:40 p.m. Oliver returned home, a hollow man drained of strength, energy and thought.

But six remembered words filtered through his consciousness: *See you tomorrow bright and early.*

FRIDAY, 12:10 P.M.

He hastily devoured a cheese sandwich at the drugstore lunch counter and then decided to walk. His nerves were too taut to allow him to sit. The witch's cauldron of hatred was still within him, bubbling, boiling.

He walked and walked. Suddenly a new thought flashed into his mind.

Damned idiot! The madman! Watching out a second story window through binoculars!

Hey! Wait a minute. That wasn't only the moon-faced man. That was himself, Oliver Wilbeck! That's what he'd been doing, too.

Madman. A slow realization crept upon him. Maybe he needed help. Maybe the lieutenant had been right about the bomb being the work of high school students, right about his imagining the smell of smoke.

A psychologist? No, a psychiatrist.

And now was the time. He had half of his lunch hour left, he was away from the office where someone might overhear him. A pay-phone booth loomed before him, as if beckoning.

He entered the booth and flicked through the yellow pages of the phone book, fingered through Plumping, Printing, Process Serving, Psychiatrists: *See Physicians and Surgeons.*

Hah! A column headed *Psychiatrists*.-Child counseling. No. Family consultation. No. Then, Robert C. Bancroft, M.D., and an address in the DeLancy Building on State Street only four blocks away.

He called. A sweet-voiced secretary answered. "Dr. Bancroft's office."

He cleared his throat. "This is Mr.—Mr. Johnson. I'd like to see the doctor as soon as possible . . . No, I haven't been a patient before . . . Who recommended me? Well—" He paused for only an instant. "I'm

not sure who the person was. Someone in my office."

"Very well, Mr. Johnson. We'll have available time during the first part of next week if that's satisfactory."

Oliver stuttered, "It—it's kind of urgent. I'd feel much better if I could see the doctor as soon as possible. I—I just don't know what I'm going to do."

"Let me look through our appointment book." The secretary was silent for a moment. "Yes, we have a cancellation for four this afternoon. The doctor can allow you forty-five minutes if you can arrive by then."

"I'll be there," said Oliver Wilbeck.

Mr. Donovan consented somewhat reluctantly to letting Oliver take what would be an hour break, but he seemed to accept Oliver's hastily-conceived excuse. "Oh well," he finally said, "if your tooth is really bothering you, go on—for an hour, if that's what you say. I'm assuming, Ollie, you'll make up the time tonight."

Oliver spent the next hour alternately typing invoices and glancing at the office clock. He was rather pleased with himself, especially at his inspired story of a non-existent toothache.

2:30 p.m., 2:45 p.m., 3:00 p.m. Three o'clock. At first he'd ignored his Window. Finally, as if drawn by a magnet, his gaze turned.

The moon-faced man was there. Hunkered forward, head turning from side to side, gaze searching the sidewalk beneath him. A wisp of cigar smoke curled up from the bottom of his window. The glint of binocular lenses. Were they again focused on Oliver Wilbeck?

Oliver closed his eyes, waiting, waiting

FRIDAY, 3:50 P.M.

He left the office quietly and hurried down Market Street, then over to State.

The DeLancy Building was huge and startlingly modern, at least compared to the ancient structure of the Donovan Accounting and Bookkeeping Company. It was twelve stories high, more shining glass than concrete support. Its foyer seemed choked with potted palms. Dozens of people streamed in and out of the impressive entrance.

It was four o'clock. The air of solemn dignity was overwhelming. Oliver stopped. What were psychiatrists' fees now?—seventy-five an hour, a hundred an hour? He shuddered.

His last view of the moon-faced man lingered strong and bright in his mind: the glittering of binocular glasses, the swirling cigar smoke, the bald head, the searching eyes.

The man *had* tried to kill him. He was *sure* he'd smelled cigar smoke

in his car last night. Imagination, the lieutenant had said. Ridiculous. Never!

Ten minutes after four.

Oliver spat. He turned away from the DeLancy Building. After all, he'd given a false name, Mr. Johnson. So what?

He shuffled back toward his office, thinking hard.

At four-fifteen he entered the little pawnshop on Market Street where he'd bought the binoculars. He walked casually and, he hoped, with aloofness. The same proprietor who sold him the binoculars was behind the counter—a white-haired man of perhaps fifty, taller than Oliver, who moved with a surprisingly youthful grace.

Take it easy, Oliver told himself. Remember it's got to be over and done. But play it cool. No rush, but be careful.

He pretended to browse through the assortment of used guitars.

"Need some help?" asked the pawnbroker.

"Well, yes, I guess so. I was interested in those revolvers in that case over there. Just wondering how much they cost."

The pawnbroker moved to the cabinet, slid back a glass door. "Some good buys here. Did you want something inexpensive or a better one maybe?"

Oliver stroked his chin, pointed toward a black-butted revolver. "Nothing expensive. Just thought I'd do a little target shooting. That one, for example. A .45 or a .22, is it? I'd like to know something of its history. How old is it?" Then the crucial question: "Oh, and do you have a record of the seller?"

"Oh, certainly," said the pawnbroker. "We keep all names of sellers and borrowers right here. This gun's a .32, Smith and Wesson, five-shot. Now this particular gun is new, just came in yesterday." He thumbed through a rectangular record book. His fingers stopped on a page. His forefinger and middle finger crawled over the scribbled lines like spider legs. "Damn that kid," he muttered to himself.

He looked up. "I'm afraid my assistant forgot to take the name of the seller, not even the gun's serial number. He's only a part-time employee, you know, a college student. I'll have to get on that boy. But don't worry. The gun's good. It's not hot, I guarantee it."

Was that a sly glint in the pawnbroker's eyes?

Oliver nodded, pleased. "And how much?"

"We'll call it forty bucks. Even throw in five rounds of ammunition. We can sell you more, of course, if you need them."

"No, I think five will do it. I don't have much—er, practicing to do. Just want to see if my aim is as good as it used to be."

Transaction complete. An empty wallet, but a tremendous

satisfaction. Oliver emerged from the shop. He was ready.

Back at his desk, the slow, hot seconds passed. In Oliver Wilbeck there was apprehension, the tightness of a warrior going into battle, but also a determination and a kind of relief. It would soon be over. The enemy would be faced and defeated. The war would be won and finished forever.

He dared now to reach once more into his desk and withdraw his binoculars.

The moon-faced man was still there. He, too, was looking through binoculars. His mouth seemed to open. Then his binoculars swooped down. The man's lips seemed to be screaming a savage, silent curse. He was looking at him—at *Oliver*. Was Oliver wrong—or was the man shaking a paw-like fist at him like a threatening hammer?

This time Oliver didn't tremble. "You have, my friend," he murmured aloud, "everything I want, everything I've ever wanted, and yet you destroy it. You symbolize all I hate, all that has destroyed me. You symbolize my enemy. That's why I'm going to kill you—tonight."

FRIDAY, 4:55 P.M.

Mr. Donovan paused while passing his desk.

"I shouldn't ask you again after last night," said his small-eyed boss. "We're in good shape now. Really appreciate it. But there's one thing that has come up for the Kenworthy Flour account. I promised we'd get some kind of report out by eight tomorrow morning. Not much to it. If you could just work another hour or two after five, that would do it."

Oliver thought: You're too excited to eat anyway. You don't want to make your move until nighttime anyway. It's better in the dark.

He nodded pleasantly. "No problem, Mr. Donovan. It'll be nighttime before I can do any—er, star watching."

"Thanks, Ollie, I won't forget it."

Later, at 5:45 p.m. Oliver took one more glance at the moon-faced man.

He was still there. His eyes seemed to beam their malevolent X-ray lights directly into Oliver's skull—and the man was laughing. His mouth was open in a great round guffaw which shook his massive body, mocking, ridiculing, the enemy triumphant!

FRIDAY, 8:23 P.M.

Oliver's work with the Kenworthy Flour account had been vanquished. There was a quick trip to his apartment, the inspection and loading of the .32 revolver and the seizure of his small battery-operated radio he'd bought to play on the beach to which he'd never had time to

go. He flicked the turn-on switch to make sure the batteries still functioned. They did.

Gun loaded. Radio ready. A woolen sport coat—thin enough certainly to allow the accurate passage of bullets, thick enough to muffle the sound, along with the sudden blast of his radio.

Outside, the street was quiet, dark, dusty, bits of newspapers scattered here and there, cigarette butts in the gutters.

Street lights illuminating the corners, a passing truck or two, four teen-age boys strolling in the direction of the drugstore.

The light over the ATLAS HOTEL was Oliver's first objective. He passed a single bulb with its small, swirling galaxy of flies and moths.

Odd, he realized, but he'd never walked down this side of the street before. Understandable though: He invariably parked the Ford in the parking lot on the other side; at noon, he remained on that same office-building side, usually walking down to the 3rd Street drugstore for lunch or in the opposite direction to the Chinese restaurant, the Peking, on 6th.

He was a little surprised at the weather-beaten, brownstone drabness of the hotel. From across the street, he hadn't been aware of the myriad pockmarks in the stone walls or the cracks in the window frames or the tiny rivulets of dry, flaky red-brown paint. There was no main floor of the hotel—only the entrance leading to a flight of worn-carpeted stairs. On the entrance's left was the blank wall of a furniture supply warehouse; on its right an empty store choked with a hodge-podge of dusty fixtures and boxes that had once been a clothing shop.

Encouraging, Oliver thought. No desk clerk, no lobby, no bellhop. Merely stairs leading upward. One feeble light globe dangled from a fixture in the high ceiling, vintage about 1920.

Let's see, he thought. *His* window is the second to the right of the entrance. Are there two windows to a room—or one? He always looks out of the same window, and yet—

Oliver reached the landing of the second story. Yet another dim bulb cast its faint illumination over the hallway which arrowed through the heart of the hotel. A sign over the first door read MANAGER: RING FOR SERVICE.

The second door to the right was only ten or twelve feet away. This must be it. Cautiously, he moved down the hallway. The door to the third room was open! He peeked in.

"Howdy. Want something?" An older man with a tangle of grayish hair was sitting on a corner of a metal bed, looking up at him.

Oliver blinked. "Oh, I was looking for the manager." His gaze flicked to the street side of the room. Only one window.

"Manager's in the first room as you come up the stairs. Didn't ya see the sign?"

"Sorry. Guess I missed it." A new thought rammed into his mind. What if the moon-faced man *is* the manager? He improvised a quick question. "Is the manager that real old guy with white hair like yours?"

The man with the tangled white hair looked annoyed and resentful. "He's got gray hair, but he's not so old."

"Thank you."

Oliver turned back into the hallway. Then the moon-faced man *was* in the second room. He was still the Enemy. He'll be at the window even now, Oliver thought. He'll be watching the teen-aged boys, the scraps of newspapers, the trucks or the streetlights.

He wiped perspiration from his upper lip and took a deep breath. He approached the second door.

A deep voice from inside the room said, "Come in."

Startled, Oliver hesitated.

"I hear you out there," said the voice. "Come in. The door's unlocked."

Oliver reassured himself by the feel of the loaded revolver in his jacket pocket. His other hand traced a shaky path to the knob, leaving the small radio bulging in his other pocket. He turned the knob. The door opened.

Gingerly, he stepped in. A single light burned, a globe in a bureau lamp.

"So it *is* you," said the voice. "I've been waiting for you." And in the moon-faced man's hand was a revolver pointed at Oliver.

THE BIG MAN WAS SEATED IN HIS CHAIR, NOT FACING THE window but the entrance to the room. He was huge, heavy-jowled, with broad and massive shoulders, and he still held a cigar in one hand. He was not flabby, Oliver received the impression that his skin was hard and solid, but they by some quirk of his metabolism there was simply too much of it. He was dressed in a plain white shirt, open at the collar, wrinkled trousers, moccasins.

"My name's Ken. Ken Morris. What's yours?"

"Why?"

"Because I want to know who I'm killing."

Oliver was shaken. "You're killing *me*?" His left hand reached for the switch of his radio, his right tightened around the revolver. "I'm killing *you*. Why do you want to kill me?"

The big man half smiled. His voice was firm, edged with a tone of finality. "Because I've hated you for a whole year. Every day—yes,

every goddamn day—I see you in that window. Nice secure job, money, work to do, people to talk to.”

Oliver snorted. “Secure job? Work from eight in the morning till seven or eight at night? Come home so tired I can hardly make myself eat? About the only person I talk to is my boss who says, ‘Do this, do that. Thanks. I won’t forget it.’ And then the whole damned thing is forgotten. No raise, no nothin’.”

“You’ve got your weekends. Two whole days. You can do whatever you want.”

“Do? Sure, chances are on Saturday Mr. Donovan—that’s my boss—will call and say, ‘Ollie, something has come up. Will you?’ And then the weekend is over. And somewhere in there I have to make that trip to the Laundromat with my washing, then to the supermarket to get groceries, and then take back those books I borrowed from the library and never had time to read. If I’m all caught up my Sunday, I get drunk. But you’ve got what I don’t have. You’ve got *time*. If I had—hell, you wouldn’t understand.”

“The hell I wouldn’t. Time? What can *I* do with it?” The moon-faced man rose, limped a step forward. “Look at this bald head, my stomach. Imagine me getting a job. Finding a girlfriend? Taking up tennis or golf with this leg? I still got a steel pin in it.”

“You were wounded? World War II?”

“Hell, do I look that old? Vietnam, yes. I’m forty-one. I was in a top regiment, mostly demolition and explosive crackerjacks. You probably never even heard of some of the places I served in: Da Nang, Binh Dinh, Quang Nam, even back in hell-and-gone country around Quang Tri.”

Oliver’s grip on his revolver eased. “I know. That was a lousy war. You guys never really got any thanks for it. All that blood, the slaughter, the agent orange, the combat.”

“Combat? For me, that’s a joke. I was a cook. Good at dishing out chow, peeling potatoes, breaking open cans of army rations. I never got in any combat. This leg? I awoled from camp one day trying to find something different to eat, something good. Maybe a stray pig or goat, some fruit, a bottle of rice wine that some gook left behind. I didn’t stumble over a pig or a goat. I stumbled over a bottle of wine that turned out to be a booby trap.”

“Then you knew violence and blood, even if you only went to a hospital.”

“Never saw a damned bit of blood, not even my own, never heard a scream, though there must have been plenty. After that booby trap hit me, I was out. Really *out*. In the hospital I was sedated, gassed,

tranquilized, doped. By the time it was over and I was awake, I was in a wheelchair being pushed through what was left of a garden."

"But the regiment. That's how you learned to make bombs?"

"Like the bomb in your car? Sure, that's why I *thought* I could make a bomb. I botched it. I did too much listening to jive, not enough doing. It's one thing to be a bomb expert. It's something else to be a cook keeping mud out of watered-down stew. It's not the same."

Oliver saw Ken Morris' revolver descend slowly down, down.

He said. "How cha know I was coming?"

"I saw you watchin' me. I'm a pretty good watcher—got nothing else to do. Too, maybe there's some kind of telepathy, a feeling. I felt like you wanted to kill me just like I wanted to kill you."

Oliver's hand completely left the revolver in his pocket, traveled to scratch his neck. "And I represent everything you don't have, everything you hate. I still don't understand."

"Because you're a symbol. You're what men are supposed to be. You set a standard. I can't live up to that standard. I'm tired of being stepped on and pushed around. I have to strike back."

"Yeah. A symbol. That's what I thought of you. And I want to strike back, too. I'm tired of being stepped on."

There was a long pause. "If you killed me, what would you do tomorrow? The same things you talked about?—going to the Laundromat, the market, the library, the dirty dishes?"

"I suppose so. But if you did kill me, I wouldn't really care much."

"Same as me. I wouldn't care much either."

The seconds seemed to slow, thoughts and actions like swimmers under water.

Oliver glanced around the small room. "Don't you have a TV? That would give you something to do."

"Can't afford it. Every month I think I'm going to save enough to buy one—but I never do. That vet's pension doesn't go far, you know."

Oliver's lower lip sagged, and a moisture crept into his eyes. "I wish you hadn't told me your name and about Vietnam. You shouldn't have told me those things. But you're not the one I want to kill."

Ken Morris said, "And you're not the one for me. Hey, do you play any cards, poker or anything, or chess?"

Oliver brightened. "I used to be pretty good at chess. I've played some poker."

"You could drop in and see me during your lunch hours. We could play some chess or cards, maybe have a TV dinner."

"Okay, I'd like that. I'll see you soon, maybe tomorrow."

"Then take it easy. You'll find somebody else, somewhere, if that's what you want."

"That's what I want, just like you do. Except now—"

Oliver paused for a long moment, scowling, thinking hard. "—except now that I've met you, I—I'm not so sure."

Ken Morris' eyes widened. His gaze turned slightly to one side as if he, too, were thinking. Then his eyes turned back toward Oliver. "You know, I'm not quite so sure now either. When you come up, we can talk about it."

FOR LININGTON FANS

For many years, I have been a friend of Elizabeth Linington (aka Lesley Egan, Dell Shannon, etc.) and now I am beginning a small newsletter, which will be devoted to studies of her books and characters.

With her permission, I am contacting her agent and publishers.

As a regular reader of your publication, I am also hoping you can help—by letting other readers know of the existence of the newsletter. I cannot afford to purchase ads, or to use similar methods, so will have to depend on the kindness of people like you.

The newsletter will be quarterly, at \$12 a year. Please use my home address, but it is all right to refer to my academic position* if that will give subscribers added confidence that this is a genuine publication.

Many thanks!

Reinhart S. Potts
1223 Glen Terrace
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She was beginning to worry him. No longer was she the frightened victim. She was leading up to something. And that something was murder!

The Big Score

by JAMES GORDON WHITE

TONY DECARLO WAS A PETTY THIEF LOOKING FOR A BIG score. For a month, he'd been watching the house in Laurel Canyon. Every Thursday night, the man left at seven o'clock, and didn't return until after midnight. Fifteen minutes later, his young brunette wife left, and didn't return until around eleven-thirty. Tonight they'd repeated the ritual. And now, he made his move.

The lock on the French doors at the rear of the house, posed no problem for his pick. Once inside, he went directly to the study. There'd be plenty of time to check the other rooms later. Sure enough, a wall safe was behind the second picture he checked. He'd just taken out his electric drill, and was preparing to attack the safe, when he heard a car approaching up the drive and recognized the throaty purr of

the brunette's XKE.

Dammit, this wasn't supposed to happen!

He sprang to the window, cautiously peeked out from between the drapes, and saw the car come to a screeching stop at the side of the house. Then the brunette got out, slammed the door after her, and stalked toward the front of the house. Guided by his flash, Tony raced for the front door, almost upsetting a straight-backed chair in his haste.

He reached it first, and plastered himself against the wall. His heart and lungs were trying to see which could make more noise, as he heard her footsteps on the walk. He hastily slipped the flash into a jacket pocket, withdrew a ski mask, and yanked it over his head. The footsteps stopped outside. A key fumbled in the lock. He pulled the snubnosed .38 from his belt. Then the door opened, and she stepped inside.

AS SHE FLIPPED THE WALL SWITCH, TONY'S ARM WHIPPED around her slender neck, cutting off her air. He pivoted, simultaneously slamming the door with his heel, and ramming the .38 into the small of her back. Her purse fell, scattered its contents about their feet. He put his mouth to her ear and hissed, "Don't scream and I won't hurt you. I'm just gonna rob you—that's all. Understand?"

He eased the pressure on her neck, allowing her to nod. Her body remained rigid, but she offered no resistance, as he slowly took his arm away and said, "Now we're going into the study." He grabbed her wrist, twisted it up behind her back, then, keeping the muzzle riveted to her backbone, herded her into the room, and flipped the wall switch with his shoulder.

He guided her to the straight-backed chair, and ordered her to sit. She warily perched on the edge of the seat, her hands gripping its sides, and stared up at his ski-masked faced with wide blue eyes. Keeping the .38 trained on her, he edged to his bag, and fished out several lengths of rope. Her eyes shifted from the gun to the ropes, as he moved back to her.

"Is that necessary?" she asked.

"I got better things to do than watch you." He read her concern, took the sting from his voice, "Hey, relax . . . this is *all* I'm gonna do to you. Okay?" She managed a nod.

Tucking the gun into his belt, he moved behind her, and placed a black-gloved hand on her shoulder. She stiffened at his touch. "Now put your hands behind this chair," he said lightly, "and I'll make with the Boy Scout knots."

As she reluctantly placed her slim wrists together, he noticed her

ornate gold watch and large diamond ring, and had to fight his impulse to yank them from her. She was cooperating and he didn't want to upset her. Besides, he could always take them after he had her secured. He carefully looped the rope above the watch, and deftly lashed her wrists together, drawing it tight. She squirmed a bit, but didn't voice a complaint. After securing the end of the rope to the chair rung below the seat, he moved around in front of her and repeated the process on her trim ankles. Then he stood and reached for the scarf about her head. She recoiled with a sharp gasp, then realized what he was after.

"Please . . . can't that wait? I won't scream."

He considered, then shrugged, and dropped the folded scarf into her lap. She managed a grateful smile. He stepped back and looked at her for the first time. She was tall for a woman; in her high heels she was over an inch taller than him, and he was average height. Her sleeveless white blouse and black satin pants seemed molded to her shapely figure. Long raven hair framed her beautiful face and fell below her shoulders. At first glance he judged her to be late twenties, but a closer look revealed the fine lines around her eyes, and he settled on mid-thirties. He saw the apprehension in her big blue eyes, and grinned behind his mask.

"I didn't say I wouldn't look," he said dryly. Some of her tension eased. "I don't suppose you feel like telling me the combination of that safe, huh? Save me a lotta trouble."

"There's less than a thousand dollars in it. My husband rarely keeps large sums of money in the house."

"I'd like to see for myself—not that I don't trust you."

She gave a small shrug, then said, unexpectedly, "Seven. Thirty-seven. Three."

HE WENT TO THE SAFE AND OPENED IT. TO HIS disappointment, it contained seven hundred and twenty dollars. He stuffed the bills into his pocket and returned to her. She sat watching him with a thoughtful frown, her fear replaced by deep concentration.

"Okay, I'll settle for the jewelry."

She shook her head. "It's either fake or semiprecious stones. The expensive pieces and the furs are kept in a safety deposit vault in Beverly Hills. I take them out on special occasions."

He had a sickening feeling she was again telling the truth. "I'm still gonna check out the upstairs."

"I'm sure you will. But may I ask you something first?"

"Sure."

She hesitated, her eyes staring directly into his, then asked, "Have

you ever killed anyone?"

"Hey, what kinda question is that?" Tony bristled indignantly. "And if I did, you think I'm stupid enough to tell you about it?" He paced about, shaking his head and sighing.

"Why not?" she replied simply. "I can't identify you."

He stopped and glared down at her. She was beginning to worry him. No longer was she the frightened victim. She was coolly leading up to something. And that something was murder. Every instinct told him to end this right now. Take whatever he could and get out—fast! But that hunger for the big score told him: stay and listen to her.

"Okay, lady, you want to say something—say it!"

"You've been watching this house long enough to know that my husband goes out every Thursday night."

"And so do you."

She nodded. "He goes to see his mistress, and I follow him: I've been trying to work up the courage to confront them. I'd planned to do that tonight, but I lost my nerve."

"So that's why you came home early." She nodded. "And you've decided you want this mistress out of the way, huh?"

"That won't solve the problem. Sooner or later my husband will leave me. It's his pattern. I'm his third wife. I took him away from his second wife, because I was younger." She smiled bitterly. "Now I'm not as young."

Tony couldn't work up any tears. "Divorce him first."

She shook her head. "Since his other divorces he's become expert at hiding his true financial wealth. I wouldn't receive my fair share in a settlement . . . but it would be different if he were dead."

"And you want me to waste him when he comes home?"

"Yes."

"For seven hundred and twenty dollars, and whatever else I can scrounge up around here? No way!"

She leaned forward, her eyes large and earnest. "I'll pay you more, much more."

"You're damn right." He pointed a gloved finger down at her for emphasis. "If I was to do something like that, I'd want to see the cash first!"

She leaned back, a frown etching her lovely face, and thought for a moment. Tony paced. It didn't help. Then a confident smile brightened her face. "Next Thursday is the end of the month. My husband will collect a large sum of money from his various businesses, and won't bank it until Friday."

"How much?"

She shrugged. "At least fifty thousand." Tony started to make interested noises, but she continued: "And Wednesday night we're going to a charity dinner. I'll take out a fur and some of my most expensive jewelry, and won't return them to the vault. You can take them and the money."

He eyed her narrowly. "Why so generous?"

"Everything is insured," she replied casually. "Now are you interested?"

TONY WAS SWEATING: HIS MIND REFUSED TO RETAIN A concentrated thought. He needed time to think. He couldn't do that with her watching him. "I'm going upstairs," he announced, "just to make sure there're no jewels." He knew there wouldn't be, but it was a good excuse to get away from those big blue eyes and think. He took the scarf from her lap; this time she didn't shy away. "This is just in case you've been feeding me a lotta bull." She didn't object as he wound the scarf around her mouth, and knotted it tightly. After testing the knots holding her wrists, he left her sitting there, and went upstairs.

A quick search of the rooms revealed she'd told him the truth. In the master bedroom he found a picture of the happy couple. The man was fiftyish, graying, distinguished, and oozed a confident arrogance that said he'd never known a day of poverty. Tony hated him instantly. Zapping him would be a pleasure.

Removing his mask, he flopped down on the round king-sized bed and luxuriated in its softness. In all his twenty-nine years, he'd never slept in a decent bed. In fact, he'd never had anything decent; not that he'd ever done anything to deserve it. He took out his cigarettes and smoked, adding his ashes to the others in the bedside ash tray, while he thought about the brunette. He thought real hard.

Did she really want her old man offed, or was it just a clever put-on, to keep him from hurting her? Somehow he didn't think so. Then, that meant she needed somebody. She was too smart to try and do it by herself. She couldn't very well place an ad in the neighborhood paper; and, regardless of the movies, it wasn't that easy to contact the Mafia. Once you used them, you lived in constant fear of blackmail, or a favor, which you couldn't refuse, in return. Yeah, she needed him. And he'd make sure she kept her part of the bargain.

He crushed out his cigarette, flushed the butt down the bathroom toilet, then put on his mask again and went back downstairs.

She was where he'd left her. She didn't appear to have made an effort to free herself. He loosened the scarf, and pulled it down about her neck. She breathed a sigh, moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue,

and looked up at him expectantly. He expelled his breath in a deep oral sigh, and said, "Okay, I'll do it." Her face lit up like a child's at Christmas. He felt good all over. It was nice to make somebody happy. Especially when that somebody was going to give him over fifty thou in return.

She nodded toward the open safe. "You'd better replace the money or my husband will be suspicious."

"Hey, I want some cash up front, you know, seal our deal."

"There's only about a hundred dollars in my purse—but I can take a thousand out of the bank tomorrow."

"You call that money?" Tony sneered.

"How will it look," she asked calmly, "if a week before my husband's death, I took a large sum of money from my account?"

He reluctantly saw her logic, but didn't like it. "Well, how do I know you're not jiving me? I leave with a hundred bucks, you don't show tomorrow, and the cops are waiting if I come back here."

"And how do I know you won't take the money I give you tomorrow and leave town?" She smiled, gave a casual shrug. "We'll have to trust each other."

TONY FUMED INWARDLY. SHE SAT THERE TIED HAND AND foot, helpless, and yet she was coolly manipulating him. It seemed somebody was always doing that. But once he had that big score nobody—but nobody—would ever manipulate him again! As a petty show of rebellion, he took the bills from his pocket and deposited them in her lap. "You might want to count 'em first."

She ignored his sarcasm and asked, "Where shall we meet tomorrow?"

Tony thought for a moment. "There's a hot dog stand on the corner of Santa Monica and Sierra Bonita, in West Hollywood. Be there at noon." Then he pointed at her feet, and added, "And don't wear those high heels."

She frowned questioningly, then measured him with her eyes, and smiled, amused. "I'll come barefoot." Tony didn't share her humor.

"Okay, I'm going now," he said and walked over, and collected his bag of tools.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" she asked dryly, squirming a little in the chair.

He stopped before her, shook his head. "You're staying like that until I'm long gone."

"Aren't we supposed to trust each other?"

"I've trusted you enough tonight. Bring me the money tomorrow,

and I'll trust you like my sister." He trusted his bimbo sister about as much as a cow trusts a slaughter house.

She reluctantly allowed him to replace her gag. Then he loosened the ropes about her wrists. "You should be able to get loose in less than an hour." He read the distress in her large blue eyes and pointed to the digital clock on the desk. "Your husband won't be back for over two hours." She still wasn't happy, but there was nothing she could do.

On his way out, Tony stopped in the foyer, and collected the money from her purse. There was eighty-seven dollars and fifty-two cents. He left the two cents.

THE NEXT DAY TONY KEPT HER WAITING FOR AN HOUR, while he made sure there were no plainclothesmen lurking about. He watched her from the juice bar across the street, and relished her discomfort with her surroundings. The hot dog stand's main customers were gays and punk rockers. In her neat white skirt, long-sleeved blouse and long-laced sandals, she looked as out of place as a Russian Wolfhound at the city pound. It was a hot day, and only he knew the reason for her long sleeves. By the time he finally called her on the pay phone, she'd gone through two hot dogs and sodas, a pack of cigarettes, and had rejected half a dozen propositions, mainly from bare-chested male hustlers who were trying to expand their trade on a slow day.

"Where *are* you?" she asked irritably.

"Watching you. Don't bother looking, you won't see me. You bring my money?"

"Yes. Now when will I see you?"

"Hang up, leave your car, and walk three blocks east, to Plummer Park. I'll meet you inside."

"Isn't there somewhere more private?"

"Ninety-five percent of the people there are Russian immigrants; they won't understand ten words of what we say."

He hung up, then cautiously trailed her to the park. No suspicious cars or pedestrians tagged after her, so he decided she was on the level; still he didn't use the Santa Monica entrance, but turned on Vista, walked through a block of quaint old houses and apartments, and entered in the middle of the park.

He found her by the children's playground, trying to look interested in the gleeful antics of the howling little people. He always avoided that area like the plague; besides a masochist, only a loving parent, or someone bordering on senility, could endure the sights and sounds of small children at play. She recognized him as he walked up. She should.

Twice he'd strutted past her table at the hot dog stand. He was pleased to find that in her flat sandals she was over an inch shorter than him. Short men look dumb with tall women.

"You look better without the mask."

He grinned, ran a hand through his straight brown hair. "Yeah. I'm handsome, right?"

She shrugged. "Well, almost."

He enjoyed the glances they were receiving. Being seen with a beautiful woman was always an ego trip. One he hadn't experienced too often. He took her elbow and guided her away, in search of a bench.

The nearby benches were packed with plump, dowdy, middle-aged women, chattering away in Russian or Yiddish. The men, all clones of the women, had a monopoly on the shady tables, and the daily noisy card games were in progress. Except for a few tables set aside for the more intellectual types who preferred chess, the same thing was being repeated at the other tables, throughout the small park. Despite the NO GAMBLING signs, Tony suspected it went on.

THEY SETTLED ON AN EMPTY BENCH NOT FAR FROM THE tennis courts. She took an envelope from her purse and handed it to him. He tucked it into his shirt pocket without opening it.

She arched an eyebrow. "Does that mean you finally trust me?" He shrugged noncommittally. It was easier than lying. She crossed her legs, ran her finger tips over the white laces wrapping a slim ankle. "Thanks to your previous suspicions, there are marks on my wrists and ankles that I'll have to hide for days." Her large blue eyes rebuked him. "Do you know how much trouble that is?" She wriggled her ankle for him to admire her handiwork. He admired her ankle.

Tony grinned self-consciously and said, "Hey, you're making me feel bad." Her eyes said she didn't think so. He took out his cigarettes. "Now you want to talk about next Thursday," he asked, "or you want to complain some more?" He started to light his cigarette, then remembered his manners, and paused to offer her the pack. She smiled, took one, and he lit it before lighting his own.

"All right," she said, "come to the back of the house at eleven. I'll be waiting in the den. You smash a glass in the French doors, so that the break-in will be obvious. We'll ransack the rooms, then you use your tools to open the safe."

He nodded, sucked on his cigarette. "The money'll be inside?"

"Yes. Then we wait for Jason to come home. When he does—" She broke off with a distressed grimace as blaring hard rock music engulfed them, making normal conversation totally impossible. Tony turned and

followed her gaze.

A HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD TYPE, WITH A HUGE TRANSISTER radio perched on one shoulder, speakers turned toward his ear, was ambling along, intent on sharing his music with the park, and all of West Hollywood. Spreading migraines and shattered eardrums, he was a walking argument for noise pollution laws. Though he was a good fifteen yards away, it sounded as if the radio was on the bench with them. To their horror, he was eyeing a shady patch of ground opposite them.

As shouting was out of the question, Tony flipped his cigarette into the area, just as the punk was about to stake his claim. He glared over at Tony, who shook his head and motioned him away. He held his ground, said something that was drowned by the music; but when Tony slowly stood up and did his best John Wayne imitation, he begrudgingly shuffled off. The music remained for a long time.

Tony sighed his disgust and shook his head. "Those whackos with their big radios really frost me."

She shrugged. "He probably has to play it that loud to even hear it."

"I hope it turns his brain to mush," he muttered. Then he plopped down beside her, and dismissed the incident. "Now where were we—oh, yeah, I'm supposed to blow your old man away."

"First I'll call him into the study, so it will appear he came home and surprised a burglar opening the safe." He grunted his approval. "Before you go, tie and gag me upstairs in the bedroom." She gave him a purring smile. "Being a sadist, you'll enjoy that." Tony looked genuinely wounded. She ignored him. "Then you leave with the fur and jewelry, too. The maid will find me when she arrives in the morning, and I'll act the distraught widow." She leaned back and smiled, pleased with her plan.

"What if he doesn't go out that night?"

"I'll make sure he does," she casually reassured him, then drew back a sleeve cuff, and glanced at her gold watch. "Now if there's nothing else, I have an appointment at the hairdressers". She dropped her cigarette to the pavement, crushed it beneath her sandal.

Tony concealed his disappointment. It was nice sitting here with her. He enjoyed the envious glances. "Okay, we've got a date for Thursday night."

She gracefully stood, fixed him with her eyes. "Everything will be waiting for you; just see that you earn them."

He grinned and gave a broad shrug. "Hey, no problem!"

Her smile was almost pleasant. She turned and walked away, leaving

her expensive perfume lingering in his nostrils. He sat watching her and dreaming of the good life she represented, and which her money would buy. Then he left the park, walked three blocks to his roach-infested, one-room garage apartment, where he opened her envelope and carefully spread the ten one hundred dollar bills on his unmade bed, and continued his dreams of being a handsome, young international jet setter.

THURSDAY MORNING, TONY WOKE UP BROKE AND SICK with fear. He tried to tell himself that his system just wasn't used to the rich life he'd led since last Friday night. But when the shakes and heaves hadn't left him by noon, he reluctantly faced the truth. He couldn't murder anybody in cold blood. He'd done his share of mugging and street fighting, but he'd never pulled the plug on anybody.

He lay there trembling and sweating, aware that the big score was once more eluding him, condemning him to this life of sleaze. That made him feel even worse. Then it finally dawned on him—he didn't have to kill anybody. All he had to do was take the money and jewels, and leave before her old man arrived. It meant giving up any plans for future blackmail, but so what? He'd be careful with this money and make it work for him. He was almost thirty, and it was time he started really enjoying life. From tonight on, he was gonna be a changed man.

SHE WAS RESTLESSLY PACING ABOUT INSIDE THE DEN when he arrived, and tapped on the French doors. Her matching short white nightgown and negligee gave just the right touch of sexy innocence. Nobody would suspect her of waiting for a burglar. She was happy to see him; and he was just as happy to be there.

To humor her, he carefully removed one of the door panes with his glass cutter, and then followed her around the downstairs rooms, supervising the ransacking; not all burglars left a room looking like a hurricane had passed through. It was the least he could do; anyway it eased his guilt. They entered the study, and he went straight for the safe. Unfortunately, he'd forgotten the combination. She was no help.

"You're supposed to force it open," she casually reminded him.

"First, I'd like to look at the money," he said, doing a bad job of hiding his anxiety.

"You will," she said, taunting him with a smile, "after you've broken into the safe."

Tony wanted to break her face. Common sense intervened. The desk clock told him there was still enough time to do it her way. Frothing inwardly, he unzipped his bag and took out the electric drill. She

helpfully pointed out a nearby wall socket, and he went to work.

The job took longer than he'd expected, and the safe yielded only two thousand dollars. As he stood staring in disbelief at the stack of bills he held, he heard her slippers out in the hall; he'd been so intent on the safe that he hadn't noticed she'd left the room. He turned to see her enter, carrying a mink jacket and a small plastic sack containing jewelry.

"You may as well have these now," she announced, moving to the leather couch and depositing her burden.

He angrily waggled the bills. "Hey, where's the rest of this?"

"You'll get it, after you've killed my husband," she replied icily, "otherwise, you might change your mind." She motioned to the fur and jewels. "These, and the money you have, prove that I'll keep my word."

Tony squirmed inwardly; once again, life was thwarting him. The clock read ten till midnight. A small voice urged him to grab what he had and run while there was still time. No! He wasn't gonna be cheated out of the big score!

Hurling the bills aside, he lunged, grabbed her shoulders, shook her violently. "I want it now!" She fought wildly. He slapped her to the floor. "Tell me—or I'll really start hurting you!" he snarled.

She dazedly pushed herself up on an elbow, wiped blood from a corner of her mouth. "Go on," she spat, "it will only make my story more believable to the police."

He managed a tight smile. "Look, I don't want to do that; just give me the money—okay?"

She shook her head defiantly. "There's not enough time for you to beat it out of me, or try and find it yourself before my husband—" She broke off as a car was heard in the driveway. It drew nearer. "Please trust me," she begged, her voice scarcely above a whisper. The car stopped outside.

Tony knew there was no other way. Since he'd first seen this house, it had all been building to this inescapable moment—he was going to kill her husband. He nodded, yanked the .38 from his belt, and rushed to one side of the door; behind him, the leather creaked as she settled on the couch.

The front door opened and closed, then footsteps were heard. She sweetly called him to the room. Tony pressed back against the wall, as a man's voice responded, and the footsteps grew louder. Fear threatened to destroy him, his whole body leaked sweat. He forced a deep breath, fought back the nausea and dizziness that weakened his knees. Then the footsteps entered the room, abruptly halted. The tall man glanced from

the open safe to his wife, seated on the couch.

"Jason dear, there's someone here who has something for you," she purred deliciously.

The man turned, saw Tony and his .38. His face ran the gamut of emotions, finally settled on fear. Several eternities passed, while they stood frozen, each waiting for the other to move or speak.

"What are you waiting for—do it!" shrieked the woman.

Her words restored thought and animation to both men. The man lunged, caught Tony's unsteady hand, and they wrestled for the .38; desperation and adrenalin fueled their struggle. As Tony was slammed against the wall, the .38 aborted, in the direction of the couch. Then slowly, very slowly, its snub nose turned inward, toward the men, and a second shot ended the contest. The man reared back and collapsed, spread-eagled, on the floor; a bright, spreading red stain ruined the left side of his expensive white cardigan.

Tony's stomach turned over, tried to rise up, but was squelched by sheer determination. Averting his eyes from the corpse he'd made, he moved to the couch on stilted legs.

The woman sat with her arms limp at her sides, her long sleek legs sprawled, her head resting back on the couch. She wasn't breathing. He saw the reason; an ugly red hole was in the middle of her ivory forehead, right between her wide, staring blue eyes. She wasn't nice to look at any more. He shook her shoulder, desperately willed her to life. He was no faith healer. That lousy first shot, aimed at nobody, had effectively put the big score beyond his grasp. Fate was laughing its head off.

He was tempted to scoop up the scattered bills and run, but avarice compelled him to ignore reason. Forty-eight thousand dollars was hidden here somewhere, and he'd be haunted for the rest of his life, if he didn't find out.

TONY WAS STILL FRANTICALLY SEARCHING WHEN THE
police arrived. They were polite enough, and even helped him look. There was no money. But when the woman's body was removed from the couch, something was found tucked between its arm and the cushion.

It was a small shiny revolver.

Only then did Tony realize the complete extent of her double-cross: that revolver had been meant for him.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

JAMES GORDON WHITE (*The Big Score*) tells us:

I was born in Houston, Texas. My father is a geologist (retired); as a result lived all over Texas, in several states, and in Cairo, Egypt as a child. Traveled to Egypt with my mother on a troop ship; V-E Day declared while we were at sea. Attended University of Houston, and Pasadena Playhouse. Professional screenwriter since 1967. Was the only staff writer for American International Pictures; eleven motion picture credits. This is the first short story I have ever written, and I'm delighted *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* is publishing it.

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON (*Biology Class*) writes:

I've sold stories to such anthologies as BEYOND LANDS OF NEVER (Allen & Unwin), ELSEWHERE (Ace), WEIRDBOOK, THE BERKLEY SHOWCASE III and V (Berkley Books), and numerous others. I have three novels in print but none in the mystery/suspense category, another novel in press, and am currently working on another contracted to the Berkley Group. I've also edited four anthologies, including TALES BY MOONLIGHT (terror and supernatural mix), which had a collectors' hardcover edition this year and will have its mass-market edition from Tor Books next year. I'm a recipient of the World Fantasy Award for my work as an anthologist.

The soldiers waited for the emperor to appear, but they would have a long wait. The emperor was dying on the brick porch, with a knife handle protruding from his bleeding chest!

Behold A Pale Horse

by RICHARD E. GIVAN

I SURVEYED THE STEAMING BATTLE PLAIN. REDCOATS formed into squares to defend against the screaming French Curassier charge. The infantry's withering musket volleys repulsed the cavalry attack, but the French six-pound cannon batteries in turn cut terrible, smoking swatches through the British formations. Wellington's Royal Dragoon guards gentled their steeds, nostrils flared at the smell of blood. Their commander directed his troops from the shelter of one of those squares.

Napoleon had committed all the French reserves in a desperate gamble to annihilate the British before Blucher's Prussians pushed over his army's right flank. The fight was balanced on a razor's edge.

The cream of the elite—the French Old Guard Grenadiers—stoically watched the carnage while standing guard for their absent emperor. The knock on the door, I assumed, announced his arrival.

I turned from the miniature diorama occupying the top of a card table alongside the far wall of my apartment. "Coming!" I called to the door.

Swinging it open revealed a sight that was bloodier to me than the

vignette of Waterloo. My friend Benjy lay stretched across the cold, brick porch with a knife handle protruding from his chest.

"Benjy! Sweet Lord! What's happened to you!"

It cost the slight man a tremendous effort to form the single word answer. Like everything else that night it made no sense. It sounded like "marigold." Then my old friend went loose and died.

I pulled him into the townhouse, but I already knew he was dead. No breath in my ear; no pulse in the carotid. I started to tilt the head back to make an airway for CPR, but knew it was futile. He'd simply run out of blood, and there had been no way to stanch the flow around the steak knife.

OF COURSE, I CALLED AN AMBULANCE ANYWAY. THE second call went to the local precinct. The dispatcher said Carmody had just called in on duty from supper in the vicinity and would handle the homicide call. I knew him—he was a good cop, even if a little too methodical in his ways for a twenty-seven-year-old deputy district attorney like me.

The sergeant got there right away. Like I said, he was dependable if not brilliant. "I met a black-and-white outside. He's beating the bushes in the neighborhood. Be damned, Junior. I got to say, I'm not in the habit of taking murder calls at the prosecutor's house."

"And I'm not in the habit of calling them in. The novelty of the situation aside, I'd like to sort this crime out. This is the first time the victim has been a friend."

I could see Carmody's eyes hood over. He was not exactly subtle in his thought processes. Still, I would hate to be the criminal who goes against his hard nose, and even harder body. He reminded me of two hundred pounds of gristly chuck steak. "So you knew this guy?" he asked. "I just assumed that you pulled the poor slob in off the street."

"Yeah, I knew him."

"Did he say anything to you before he died?"

"No, nothing that made any sense. He was on his way over here, as a matter of fact. His name is Benjamin Watters. He ran a toy shop over on Plum Street." I was interrupted by a kaleidoscope of red light flashing through the window.

I opened up for the white coats with the stretcher. "Through with him?" asked the older one. He looked bored. I wondered what it would take to perk him up, and I vowed that if I ever got as blasé over violent death I would switch to searching titles.

"No. Got to look him over first," said Carmody. "Why don't you two take a cup of java up at the corner?" They jumped at the chance.

"Now then, what the hell's going on, Junior?"

I reminded myself that the shell-backs in the precinct who persisted in calling me Junior were probably paying tribute to the memory of my deceased father who served the department for twenty-five tough years before he checked out with a bum heart. That was the fall I started law school. Dad pretended to be horrified at my career choice—he had little good to say about the profession. I think he was proud of me, anyway. I regret that he wasn't around to see me take a job on the "right side."

"I've known Benjy for about four years. I wandered into his store the winter that Dad died. I went for a lot of walks that year. Benjy's shop kept alive moving model cars and junk like that. What really lit him up, however, was miniature soldiers. Most people call them toy soldiers or tin soldiers, although they're a lead-tin alloy, actually."

"I see the connection," Carmody said, his St. Bernard's head nodding at my diorama. I felt a touch ashamed because I knew that he was wondering about a grown man who plays with toys.

"Law school was a terrific grind. You don't have to be Rhodes scholar to make it, but helps to have stamina like a Roman galley slave. Every so often I had to get my mind off torts and contracts. I went into the toy store to get in out of a downpour. I saw the display case of miniatures in the back of the shop and was intrigued.

"Benjy preached them to me. The fusiliers, the hussars, the lancers and carabiniers. They were all the family he had, or wanted. All his disposable income went toward expanding his collection. He infected me with the romance of the Napoleonic era. I've been reading about it and collecting figures ever since."

"That's real nice, Junior. You say he was coming to visit?"

"Yes. To look at this scene from the battle of Waterloo and to deliver a figure he'd imported specially for me."

"I guess I've put off searching the body as long as I can. How about a cup of coffee?"

"You bet." I was grateful he sent me out of the room while he went through Benjy.

I HAD A POT FRESH-MADE IN THE KITCHEN, HOWEVER, so my pride brought me back in no time. Carmody worked quickly. He had a pile of effects on the tile next to the body. Personal things, except for the small cardboard box he was extracting from deep in Benjy's coat pocket. Carmody opened it. "This your figure, Junior?"

"Yes. That's Boney and the famous white horse he rode into battle. Like I said, they're special orders through Benjy. He'd been telling me about the craft of a guy in Amsterdam who makes the best figures in

the world. He's expensive, but I looked on it as an investment. It's much more beautiful than a stock certificate."

"Here you go, Junior. My compliments." He handed me the mounted figure.

"Don't you need it for evidence?"

"Evidence of what? We both know it'll be tied up in the property room for months, and then one of the clerks will probably steal it for his kids. Go on, take it."

I'd already paid for it, so I took it. Then I answered the door again.

The ambulance boys were back for Benjy. With them was the uniform Carmody must have met. Carmody asked him what he'd turned up.

"Not a lot. It was easy to follow the blood trail back around the corner. I figure he was accosted and stabbed there. I knocked on all the doors around, and found a guy who admitted that he'd heard a scream. He hit the outside lights and must have scared off the assailant. He saw two men leave in different directions. One ran and one—the victim I guess—lurched. He gave me the usual detailed description of the attacker. Said he was a big guy. Here's the name and address of the witness—you'll be wanting to talk to him yourself, Sarge. I gotta hit the street now. Good luck with the case."

"That should wrap it up here, then," said Carmody. "I'll get the knife to the lab for prints and go around to the victim's home and shop in the morning. Say, you know the guy and a little about his business. How'd you like to go with me? Your boss'll probably let you go—I'll square it with him if you like."

"Sure. I'm not doing anything except writing dull appellate briefs. I'd like to. One more thing, Sergeant, I told you earlier that he died without telling me anything important. He did manage to say one word with his last breath. His voice was weak, and I could barely hear him. It makes no sense, but I guess I should tell you anyway. He said something that sounded like 'marigold'."

CARMODY SWUNG BY TO PICK ME UP IN A TAN, UNMARKED Ford. "You all clear for the day?" he asked.

"Yes. Johnstone said you called requesting my help, and he thought they could survive the day without my services. His only worry was what budget code to charge my time to. What did you learn from our witness last night?"

"Hell, I didn't even bother. I got his statement from the patrol officer, and it sounds like he didn't have anything solid. Show me where this toy store is. According to his papers, the victim's home

address is the same as the store."

"I think he lives upstairs."

I was surprised he didn't know where the store was—he should have known that block like the roof of his mouth. Carmody wheeled up to the curb as he radioed our location. He used the keys he'd removed from Benjy the night before to let us in. The store had a garish look—I felt the brightly packaged toys should have been in mourning dress.

"So, what are we looking for?" I asked the detective.

"See if you can find his records."

We found them in a tiny stock room off the back. There were the standard licenses, permits, and the like. There were no employee records—when I thought back, there never was anyone in the store besides Benjy. I guess he had nothing else to do with his time. I wished I'd found more time to visit him.

"Here's some papers about imports, Junior. Why don't you apply your legal expertise, and see what you make of them? I'll take a look upstairs."

There weren't very many. The folder held various papers dating back over the years. The only recent one concerned the order that included my mounted Napoleon figure. I was surprised to see the order was for two sets.

I found the detective upstairs. He must not have been entirely comfortable either—he jumped when I stepped into the room behind him. "This doesn't add up," I said. "Benjy told me that he'd love to order one of the figures too, but that he was spending all his money on rounding out his Coldstream Guards collection."

"Maybe he came into some extra money."

"I doubt that. You don't get rich running a shop like this."

Carmody was sandbagging me from the smile on his face. "Then tell it to his bank book. The bottom line shows a nifty five-thousand dollar deposit last month."

Everything in the apartment, except his collection, had a seedy air to it. I'd seen most of his soldiers at one time or another. Benjy liked to rotate them in his display case downstairs. A little bench in the kitchen held simple tools and painting supplies for the figures that he worked on. It also held the remnants of the extra Napoleon.

"Oh yeah, I found the other figure. Looks like your friend massacred the little bugger!" said Carmody. Indeed, a jeweler's saw lying on the bench had obviously been used to saw up the little general and his horse.

"No way would Benjy do this to such a fine piece. He'd rather cut off his own arm than that soldier's lead one."

"I don't think the toy self-destructed, Junior."

"I don't care about the logic of the situation. Benjy was not capable of sawing that figure in half. Both pieces especially. It'd be like my old man robbing a bank."

"You just never know about people, my young friend."

WE CANVASSED THE NEIGHBORHOOD TO SEE WHAT THE residents knew. People don't realize how much police work consists of routine drudgery. I talked to a woman who worked in the laundromat a few doors up from the toy shop. "Did you know him well?" I asked.

"Not really. He used to come in for change once in a while. He was always kind of a loner, you know? It seems like the last month he was even quieter than ever. He seemed to be worried about something."

"When was the last time you talked to him?"

"Just last night. We were waiting at the bus stop. We didn't talk about anything in particular, but, strangely, he seemed to be in a good mood. Kind of happy, like all his problems were over."

"One last question. Did you ever see in his shop, or hear Benjy speak about, flowers? Especially marigolds."

Her sudden nervous laugh threatened to throw her dentures. "No. Never."

I met the Sergeant back at Benjy's shop to compare notes. I told him what I'd learned from the woman; he told me he had a fair lead. Benjy's former business partner had left the shop in a dispute over the books. Carmody had scraped up some proof of bad blood that gave him a motive. The problem was that Carmody feared that it was the kind of case where you chase down enough evidence to know who did it, but not enough that my boss will take it to court and risk denting his conviction ratio.

"There was one thing I didn't happen to notice among his things . . .," tendered Carmody as we drove away from the store.

"Marigolds," I completed.

Carmody dropped me at my apartment. It was before quitting time, but close enough that it would have been futile to drudge downtown to the office. I was generally depressed at the way the investigation was headed. I'm not naive enough to think that all, or even most, crimes are wrapped up neatly, but I had a personal interest in this one. I was reminded of that interest when I stepped over the brown stain in the foyer.

THE REFRIED BEANS WERE OVERDONE, BUT THE BURRITO still cold in the middle. Even my microwave had turned on me. At least

my indigestion matched my mental outlook. The TV news failed to generate any whopping belly laughs. I kept seeing marigolds in the faces on the tube, anyway. It was too early to go to bed, so I thought I'd try my hand at casting some figures.

I dragged a cardboard box of supplies out of the broom closet and set up at the kitchen table. I'd bought them in an orgasm of do-it-yourselfism brought on by reading a slick mail-order catalogue. There was a little electric stove built with a ladle for melting the lead/tin mix. Metal molds formed the figures. I chose a mold of a 6th Curassiers Officer and switched on the stove.

I made two pours before the mold was hot enough for the figure to fill out—the molten metal cools and solidifies before the detail is fleshed out unless the mold is prewarmed. I put the deformed figures back into the ladle for remelting, and sat back for it to heat.

I mused about Benjy. He was eccentric, but we never had problems communicating. He must have been trying to tell me something important with his last word on earth.

Marigold . . . Marigold . . . My sight wandered to the little general on his splendid white horse. The horse named after one of Napoleon's brilliant early conquests. "Marengo!" I shouted. "The horse was named Marengo!"

"I figured you'd make the connection before long." It was my turn to jump at the big detective's unannounced entry.

"Carmody! Benjy was trying to tell me about the horse!"

"No doubt. Have you got a saw handy?"

"Sure, down in the box." I finished it out. "I'd bet anything that there is some sort of contraband in the horse."

I gritted my teeth, but my excitement overpowered my reluctance. I started a saw cut in Marengo's belly.

Within a quarter-inch I knew I'd hit paydirt. The thin blade cut through the soft metal to show that it was a hollow shell containing a lumpy velvet pouch. A minute's delicate sawing freed the pouch from the animal.

"What do you think, Sarge. Heroin? Microfilm?"

Carmody's face was a mixture of triumph and sorrow. "Diamonds," he said.

HE WAS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT. OUT OF THE POUCH ROLLED a dozen huge glittering diamonds along with some cotton wadding.

"You're a better sleuth than I gave you credit for!" I said.

"Not necessarily," he said. "You see; I had access to a little more information than you did. I'll be taking those rocks now, Junior." His

voice was suddenly harder than the diamonds. The snub nose that appeared in his hand did nothing to ease the tension.

"Carmody—you're not mixed up in this, are you?"

"Only up to my big old jug ears, Sonny."

I was confused. "But you gave me the horse when you took it from Benjy!"

"You saw me take it. I preferred that you had it rather than having to put it on record in the property room. Besides, I had to find out what you knew."

"You couldn't have killed Benjy—you were at the restaurant when it happened," I said.

"I said I was at the restaurant. I just got there when I called Benjy to see if the figure was there yet. He told me he wasn't going to go through with the deal. I couldn't talk sense with him. He said he was going to you with the story. I swiped a knife from the restaurant and hustled over to cut him off. When that guy switched on his porch light, I had to run, but I stayed in the neighborhood and called in that I was through with supper. I didn't figure Watters would last long, and guess who would be in line to handle the dead body call? He had to screw things up by making it all the way to your place."

"How was Benjy in on this?"

"Only from the outside. I had a contact who put up the front money and could move the stuff when I got it into the country. I looked for a way to smuggle the diamonds safely. My Amsterdam man suggested this dodge. Customs would never suspect a toy like this that has some value of its own. Even if they tried to x-ray it, the lead wouldn't show anything. Neat, huh? It wasn't hard to find a shabby storeowner on the wrong side of the books."

"Why'd you have to kill him?"

"The fool; refused to cut up the figure! Can you believe that? I phoned him every day until the stupid toy arrived. When it did, he said he couldn't go through with the crime, and particularly, he couldn't bear to saw apart the figure. Can you believe that? Said he'd rather turn himself in."

"Why did you ask me to go with you to his place?"

"I had to know. I figured you'd put the word together with the horse sooner or later. I got in after I dropped you off—you ought to lock your door. I've been hiding in your utility room ever since to see if you really were wise to the horse. You just passed the test, but I don't think you're going to like the graduation ceremony."

"So it was you who sawed the piece up in Benjy's apartment while I was downstairs."

"Give the kid a cigar. I thought there was a slight chance that he had the wrong one when I shived him."

"And the suspect you made up?"

"Out of thin air."

"I can't believe you did all this—next to my old man you were the best cop I ever knew."

"I already told you—you never know about people. My whole career I've been the stereotyped dumb cop. Dumb and poor. I'm damned tired of being poor. Did you know that I'm being forced out of the department within the month because of my bad back? My disability pension will barely cover my rent."

"But you're throwing away a whole life of honesty!"

"Forget it, Junior! Honesty won't buy me a cup of coffee in this world. You can see it as well as I do—the crooks, the liars, the scum—they're the ones who make it on the bottom line. It just took me a while to wise up—that's all."

"I can't see you killing me."

"Soon you will. I'm not so dumb as people believe. I even read a little history, Junior. When I got into this scam, I read up on Napoleon, for the hell of it. Here's a quote for you that might explain my little fall from grace. Something your little emperor said, 'From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step'."

ALL EMOTION FLED THE DETECTIVE'S FACE. I KNEW HE was steeling himself to kill his dead friend's only son. I never was known as a silver-tongued orator, making strong juries weep for justice and iron-spined judges beg for advice. If I were going to survive the minute, I'd better get physical, but my hundred and thirty-five pounds were no match for the brawny street fighter. I had a thought.

"I'll gather up the diamonds before they get lost," I told him. I didn't think he'd shoot me in the middle of that chore. I turned my back partially on him. The lead in the ladle looked like mercury. I remembered from the instruction sheet that lead melts at 615 degrees.

When the diamonds were in the pouch, I carefully noted the position of the ladle's handle. I turned back and reached out with the gems in my left hand. Carmody lowered his gun hand to put it out of my reach as he went to receive the bag with his left. I dropped the bag inches short of his grasp—he instinctively stretched to catch it.

Now! I grabbed the handle and swung the ladle at him. A pound of molten lead flew across the three feet separating us. I was lucky. I got his gun hand squarely with the lead.

The sizzling sound was quickly lost in Carmody's scream. He

dropped the gun. I think it's safe to say he suddenly lost all concern for anything but his seared flesh. I would have been a lot sicker than I was had I not remembered the stain in the foyer.

I picked up the gun to cover the detective. "I'm reminded of another quote, old-timer. A quote by Wellington after he beat Napoleon at Waterloo, 'Nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won'."

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

A famous fictional detective has a face "as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling . . . eyes as empty as the North Sea . . ." Who is he?

G.K. Chesterton's *Father Brown*.

Humphrey Bogart starred in THE MALTESE FALCON in 1941. Who was the actor in the 1931 version?

Ricardo Cortez

Vera Caspary's most famous novel was made into a film starring Gene Tierney, Dana Andrews, and Clifton Webb. What was its title?

Produced in 1944 by Twentieth Century-Fox, the film was *Laura*.

What do Edna May Oliver, Helen Broderick, Zasu Pitts, and Eve Arden have in common?

They all portrayed ex-schoolteacher-turned- sleuth Hildegarde Willers in films.

In MGM's 1966 mystery film *The Alphabet Murders*, Hercule Poirot was played by what actor?

Tony Randall

Mercier wasn't surprised when he found a small but lethal bomb wired to his carburetor. It confirmed his suspicions. And now it was time for him to act!

Lions of the Night

by LEE DUGON

THERE WERE HARDLY ANY BLACKS ON THE ISLAND DURING the height of the season, let alone the middle of January. Mercier watched with intense interest as the parka-clad man toted boxes and bags from his car to the porch of the rental cottage across the street.

A call to a real estate contact identified the newcomer as Kenneth B. Spraguely, an author; but if that was Spraguely, Mercier was the Czar of all the Russians.

Still, it would seem strange if he didn't go over and introduce

himself. It was part of the game. The Imam's men knew he'd see through their ruse, and he had to pretend he didn't, knowing that he wasn't fooling them for a minute. If Patrick Mercier had to use only one word to describe what is popularly known as international intrigue and espionage, the word would be "childish."

The sun was bright that afternoon, but the air was bitter cold. Bailey's Light towered over the houses, a mammoth obelisk neatly painted red and white, and a lone fisherman stood on the pier, taking advantage of a lull in the wind.

"Hi, neighbor!"

The black man, who had thrust his head and shoulders into the car, emerged with a cardboard box in his arms and a broad, friendly smile on his face. Setting the carton on the roof of the car, he shook hands with Mercier. He looked and sounded as American as apple pie.

Mercier introduced himself, admiring the disguise. He passed himself off as a rental property owner and waited to hear what cover Spraguely would use.

"You might already know me as L.C. Stowell," the black man said.

"Seems to ring a bell," Mercier replied, "but I'm not sure."

"'Ashes to Ashes,'" Spraguely prompted.

"Sounds like a book," Mercier said. "Are you a writer?"

"I do my best. Actually, I'm here to work on a novel. They tell me it's nice and quiet on this end of the island, especially during the winter. And you can't beat the low rent."

Mercier helped Spraguely carry his gear into the cottage. The man seemed genuine enough, but as soon as he got back home, he'd contact the Agency. When you were dealing with the Lions of the Light, you didn't take chances.

Mercier politely declined Spraguely's offer of a drink and hustled back to his house.

A METHODICAL SEARCH OF HIS TRAINED MEMORY FAILED to place Spraguely in the Republic of Karao four years ago, but Mercier wasn't put off by that. The Lions of the Light might have an operative in America; it wasn't inconceivable.

He hadn't known the Lions existed when he helped the Pagatis overthrow the Niwe tribe and the Imam Mek Nandir. For all its intelligence-gathering efforts, the Agency hadn't known, either.

Karao was a piece of cake, but slim pickings. Mercier had known some mercenaries who'd been able to retire after just one good tour in equatorial Africa; the looting in the Congo, for example, had been spectacular during the early Sixties.

There were no riches in Karao—just religious fanatics with medieval minds and the latest in Czech automatic weapons. Whoever had employed the Agency, Mercier thought, had a screw loose somewhere, thinking these Moslem reactionaries would ever hop into bed with the commies.

But then the Niwes weren't really Moslems, although Mercier, who had served in Jordan and Iran, wouldn't know what to call them. Islam had passed through the area a thousand years ago and had never been brought up to date. To the Niwes, Allah was just the chief of many gods (a blasphemous heresy, in the eyes of Moslems anywhere else on earth), including the Imam Mek Nandir himself.

There was much bad feeling among the mercs over the absence of loot, so when the Imam fell into their hands, Mercier knew how Colonel Ryan would deal with him.

The Pagatis believed—and there was no reason for the mercs to doubt them—that the Imam had funneled the wealth of the country into his own hands and converted it into a hoard of diamonds. They worked on the old man all night, trying to get him to tell where he kept the jewels, but he died the next morning without a word on the subject.

Months later, a routine audit by the new Pagatis government forever dispelled the myth of the Imam's diamonds. But by then the Lions had been loosed.

Karao had been Mercier's last battle. With his earnings from tours in the Congo, Lebanon, Rhodesia, and Yemen, Mercier had bought property on the island and built up a good income. He still did errands for the Agency, but he'd seen too many good mercs go down fighting just one more battle. He'd quit while he was ahead.

He stayed in shape, however, twice a week jogging up and down the 376 steps of the spiral staircase in Bailey's Light. At 48, his crewcut had gone steel-grey and he'd put on 20 pounds he didn't need; but his moves were still smooth, and if need be, he could fight again tomorrow.

WHEN HE RETURNED FROM SPRAGUELY'S, HE RUNG UP
Sapirstein in New York and asked him to have Brandon call him at 7 p.m. at the phone booth in front of the Hess station. The Agency, anxious to neutralize the Lions, would be glad to run a check on his new neighbor.

Mercier learned about the Lions last winter, when Hooky Greenough violated Agency procedures by showing up at his house to tell him of Ryan's murder in California.

"The Agency's trying to hush it up while they figure out a plan,"

Hookey said, "but I did a little digging on my own and got the story from a friend in the Los Angeles PD. It's okay for the Agency to plot and plan, but meanwhile, good mercs are dying."

"They're gonna nail you for coming here," Mercier said; but Hookey, a stubborn little Scot, only scowled.

"You remember what we did to the Imam?"

"Vividly," Mercier said.

"Well," Hookey said, "that's what they did to Ryan, the whole works. Didn't miss a trick."

"Who did it? The Niwes?"

"You ever heard of the Lions of the Light?"

Mercier shook his head. Outside, a winter storm was building up and the wind rattled his shutters.

"They're the Imam's secret bodyguard," Hookey explained, "so secret that nobody knew they existed until the Imam's prime minister revealed it to the Pagatis under torture."

"Membership in the organization is hereditary; some families have been in for hundreds of years. There's a lot of religious mysticism and hoodoo involved, but basically they're like the Assassins of the Middle Ages—an order of fanatics, rigorously trained from childhood to protect the Imam and carry out his wishes."

"They couldn't have been trained that well," Mercier interrupted. "After all, they couldn't stop us from nabbing their boss."

"It turns out," Greenough said, "that the Imam wanted to die, as atonement for failing to preserve the Niwe regime. Now the Lions are devoting their energies to revenge. We murdered a god, you know."

Mercier shrugged it off. Over the years, he had grown indifferent to exotic customs and beliefs.

"The Colonel got careless," he said.

"Not a chance!" Hookey replied. "He'd been warned by the Agency and they had him covered pretty well, with a little help from Big Brother. The Lions got to him anyway."

"If there's one thing I've learned from a life of soldiering in Africa and Asia," Mercier said, "it's this—if you don't let those people think you're afraid of them, they'll be afraid of you."

The Lions reached Hookey two months later, despite the Agency's most stringent efforts to protect him.

MERCIER MOVED INTO HIS TWO-STORY WHITE FRAME
house by the bay as the last summer visitors were moving out. He didn't like the island in the summer, with the crowds, the traffic, and the Bennies gawking at everything. After Labor Day, however, the crowds

dispersed and the traffic lights were switched off for the winter. You could drive non-stop from Bailey's Light to the Wildlife Refuge, taking in the scenery at a sedate 35 miles per hour with no one to tailgate you.

Until the most severe cold set in, Mercier spent most of his day out on his cruiser, fishing for whatever was running. When it was cold, he relaxed with good books, imported beers, and an on-again endeavor to write his memoirs. Often he was content to sit by the window and watch the bay until he dozed in his chair.

Two weeks before Spraguely's arrival, however, the Lions broke his routine with a letter in a manila envelope, postmarked in New York with no return address. The letter, which saluted him as "Dear Mr. Mercier," was a warning:

You were one of the six capitalist mercenaries present at the death of the Imam Mek Nandir. For your part in this most blasphemous crime, you will suffer the same death you inflicted upon the sacred person of the Imam Mek Nandir.

The agent of your death will be the Lion of the Light, Maga Mek Manda. Make your peace with whatever gods you hold.

As evidence of the legitimacy of this communication, please examine the enclosed talisman.

It was Hooky's ring. He'd seen it a thousand times.

Mercier informed the Agency, and they got back to him with the little information they had on the assassin.

"Maga is one of their best," Brandon said. "He's said to be a master of false identities. Before the coup, he was working for the regime as a software specialist. Educated in Paris. Be on your guard."

"I just hope he shows up," Mercier said. "I want to pay them back for Hooky."

ACCORDING TO THE AGENCY, THERE REALLY WAS A 36-year-old black novelist named Kenneth Spraguely, writing under the pseudonym of L.C. Stowell. The physical description matched—five feet, ten inches tall, about 180 pounds, walrus moustache, some grey in his hair. Smokes a pipe. Best known for "Ashes to Ashes," a novel about a black family in Texas during the Depression. The book had earned some prestigious literary awards, but had yet to reach a wide market.

"We're reasonably sure your new neighbor is just who he says he is," Brandon reported, "but don't get careless. We're going to see if we can find another Ken Spraguely. You sit tight—don't go jumping to conclusions and getting yourself in trouble."

That, Mercier knew, was the Agency's formal disclaimer of any action he might take on his own.

L.C. Stowell's book was available at the Island Bookstore. Mercier bought a copy and spent a pleasant afternoon at home reading it. Spraguely was good, with an eye for detail and a knack for understanding complex human relationships.

The Lions, of course, could have studied the real Spraguely for years and quietly replaced him months ago. Twice they had defeated the Agency's countermeasures; for all anybody knew, their resources of money and expertise might be limitless.

Mercier planted a bug in Spraguely's living room, but never heard a peep out of it. Either it was defective to begin with—which he doubted—or Spraguely routinely checked his base for security.

Mercier checked his own property with great care, but never discovered the least evidence of surveillance or sabotage. To thwart poisoning, he bought his meals fresh every day and ate them immediately. Twice a day he checked his car, and his boat every morning.

Tired of playing cat-and-mouse, he spied openly on Spraguely, following him in his car every time the author went out for groceries or supplies. Perhaps the Mek could be baited to have it out on the spot. Spraguely's early friendliness soon dissolved. When Mercier tailed him all the way to a tobacco shop on the mainland, and back, the writer confronted him on the street after each had pulled into his respective driveway.

"You are following me around like a bloodhound," Spraguely said, "and I want to know why! Cop, spy, whatever you are, you'd best lay off, or you'll be hearing from my lawyer. Do I make myself clear?"

"I'm as much a private real estate investor as you're a writer," he said, thrusting his hands in his pockets. "You know damn well why I've been tailing you!"

The Lion was good; for his role as an outraged Ken Spraguely, Mercier thought, he should get an Oscar.

"I don't know what you're talking about, man!" he snapped, looking like he was battling an urge to grab Mercier by the lapels and shake him. "I am just trying to mind my own business. You wouldn't happen to be the Grand Dragon of the local KKK, would you? I know they have it over on the mainland."

"If you are, I want you to know something. I'm not afraid of the lousy KKK! You guys have done a pretty good job, from what I can see, of keeping blacks off this island, but this is one black who's staying here until he's damn well ready to leave. So wrap that up in your bedsheet and stuff it!"

"I'm not the KKK," Mercier replied, "and I have nothing against blacks. But I am down on Imams, if you know what I mean."

He turned on his heel and left Spraguely fuming in the street.

MERCIER WASN'T SURPRISED WHEN A LOCAL POLICE officer came to warn him. Maga Mek Manda wouldn't worry about the Beach Township cops penetrating his cover where the Agency had failed. Mercier promised to behave himself, and the policeman was satisfied.

Nor was he surprised when he discovered a small but lethal device wired to his carburetor one morning. He disarmed the bomb and arranged for the Agency to pick it up, then marched across the street to knock on Spraguely's door. From within came the steady clack-clack-clack of a typewriter.

"I just came over to apologize for the way I've harassed you," he explained. "I thought you were someone else. Now I feel positively rotten about it, and it would mean a lot to me if you'd let me take you out for flounder in my boat tomorrow. The weather's supposed to be unseasonably warm."

The Lion performed a perfect imitation of a naturally good-natured man eager to lay aside a bothersome conflict.

"I brought my fishing gear along," Spraguely said, "but I haven't had a chance to use it yet. This should be a good way to bury the hatchet. I'm sorry I accused you of being a Kluxer."

"Forget it," Mercier said. "It served me right."

FOR ONCE THE DAY MEASURED UP TO THE WEATHER-man's prediction. The temperature had already soared into the fifties by the time Mercier and Spraguely let down their lines.

They started in the bay, but Mercier avoided the good spots and they caught nothing. When he suggested heading a short distance out to sea, Spraguely was chomping at the bit for action. They motored past the light and stopped about a mile offshore, too far in to run into any of the commercial boats.

Mercier cut the engine and Spraguely began to pack his pipe.

"Before we start fishing again," Mercier said, "there's something I want to ask you."

"Shoot."

Mercier seized the writer by the parka and shoved him backwards over the gunwhales, where his head dangled a foot above the waves. The pipe vanished into the water, and although Spraguely fought desperately, he had no skill.

"Now," Mercier said, "you tell me what I want to know, or you go over the side. The water temperature's around forty degrees, and there's no way you can swim with all that heavy clothing. Speak up, or you're a dead man."

Spraguely struggled, but the strain on his back was too much for him.

"Tell me about the Lions of the Light."

"The what?"

"Tell me about the bomb you wired up to my carburetor yesterday," Mercier continued, pressing down a little harder. He hadn't expected the assassin to offer such ineffective resistance.

"Tell me about Hooky Greenough. Tell me about Bill Ryan. Tell me about the Imam, and Maga Mek Manda."

Spraguely only stared at him in helpless terror, his eyes bulging as the blood rushed to his head. Mercier could kill him at will, either by breaking his back or dropping him into the sea.

He applied more pressure, bringing Spraguely to the edge of death, but got no more than strangled moans and inarticulate pleas for mercy. Finally he hauled the man up and sat him on the deck.

"You're not Maga Mek Manda," he conceded.

"Tell me again, real slow this time," Spraguely said.

THEY WERE BACK IN SPRAGUELY'S COTTAGE. ONCE more, Mercier told him about the Karao Civil War, the capture of the Imam's compound, the mythical diamonds, and the Lions of the Light. He tried to be candid—he didn't want to go to jail for attempted murder.

"When I found that bomb in my car," he said, "that clinched it. It was your life or mine."

"If you were so sure I was your assassin," Spraguely asked, puffing on another pipe, "what changed your mind? You could have killed me out there."

"You were in excruciating pain," Mercier said, "but a professional could have escaped my hold at any time—up to the end. If you were the Mek, you'd deliberately passed up your only chance to save yourself and carry out your mission."

"Of course, there's still the bomb to think about. Maga Mek Manda

is in the neighborhood. Naturally, as the only black man around, I assumed it was you. Now I think I may have been hasty in ruling out whites, or even women."

"Racism rears its ugly head," Spraguely sighed. "That stuff gets you whites into more trouble . . . Well, now that you know he's still in circulation, what are you going to do about Maga Mek Manda?"

"Wait," Mercier said. "I'm safest if I stay put and keep my eyes open. He can't hang around forever without the Agency catching on to him."

Spraguely blew a smoke ring and cocked his head in thought.

"Quite a story you got there," he mused. "It'd make a helluva book. Yes sir, that's some opportunity for a good writer who damn near got killed by a certain party, and still isn't sure whether to take him to court."

"Are you trying to tell me something?"

"You owe me, man!" Spraguely said. "You almost wasted me, and I want a book out of it. I'll keep it anonymous, maybe dress it up as a novel. You're semi-retired, anyway. Besides, by the time I get it written and published, you'll have solved your problem with the assassin."

"One way or the other," Mercier agreed. "You got a deal."

MERCIER AND SPRAGUELY BECAME INSEPARABLE, THE soldier realizing that two targets created added complications for the Lions. For him, it meant he had to check two houses and two cars every day.

For the benefit of Spraguely's notebook and tape recorder, Mercier relived his whole career—demolitions in Korea, a stint with the CIA in Europe, fighting the Simbas in the Congo, the PLO in Jordan, the Kurds in Iran . . . and finally, Karao.

Spraguely wanted to know everything, and Mercier gained a new appreciation for "Ashes to Ashes." Scores of subjects had been interviewed, the author told him, over hundreds of hours, before that book had taken shape.

When they came to the torture of the Imam, Spraguely probed Mercier for every red fragment of the crime. A long-suppressed conscience asserted itself and made him squirm.

"Why is it so important," Mercier demanded, "to get all the nitty-gritty of what we did to him? In my business, you have to use some brutal tactics. It doesn't pay to dwell on it."

"I want the book to be authentic," Spraguely said. "Please go over it again."

Mercier told how the Imam glared when Ryan and Hooky strapped

him to the chair and Vukovich started in on him with the lighter. He dragged up details he thought he'd buried forever. It took almost as long to tell as it had taken to do, but Spraguely patiently allowed him to pause for a drink from time to time.

They'd all taken a crack at the old man, each applying his own specialty of pain. Rogers used his knife, while Vasquez went after the teeth. Norton demonstrated some new Brazilian techniques none of them had ever seen before.

"And you?" Spraguely asked. "What did you do?"

It was as if Mercier had hypnotized himself with his own words. He felt weak and light-headed, and sweated like a Turkish recruit waiting for his first one-on-one discipline lesson with his sergeant.

When it was over, he found he couldn't rise from his seat.

"Ah!" Spraguely said. "That's the effect of the drink. The Lions of the Light have studied drugs and poisons for many generations, and discovered substances as yet unknown to Western pharmacy."

Mercier strained futilely, unable to move a muscle as Spraguely tied him to the chair.

"Yes, I am Maga Mek Manda," he said. "Your suspicions were correct all along. The real Kenneth Spraguely is safely under guard in Cairo."

"But the boat!" Mercier cried. "You would have let me kill you!"

"I had no choice," the Maga Mek Manda explained, shedding his American accent for the rippling tones of the Niwe dialect. "Custom demands a certain method for your execution which could not be performed at sea. Had you slain me, a brother would have come to take my place, and so on until the ritual requirements were fulfilled."

"But why," Mercier persisted, "did you make me go through this pointless rehash? Why didn't you get it over with the day we came back from the boat?"

"Oh, I had to make sure you were who you said you were, and not just a stalking-horse planted by your Agency," Maga said. "Only someone actually on the scene would have known all the details you related about Imam's death. Your description tallies perfectly with those provided by Colonel Ryan and Mr. Greenough."

"Besides," he added, "as the price for his cooperation, the real Mr. Spraguely wants the information for a book."

"Now let us begin."

The trail of blood, leading across the floor and up the stairs, was smeared, showing that a body had been dragged. The detective followed the trail to the starboard side of the cruiser, where he found blood on the railing. Domingo didn't need a picture to tell him that a body had been thrown overboard!

The Lavalier

by CARL JACOBI

JOE DOMINGO, THE ISLAND DETECTIVE, WAS ALONE IN his office in the St. Vincent Street police barracks when the call came through. A woman with a melodious voice who gave her name as Edith Hartwick, Queen's Park Hotel, Room 602, said she was calling about her friend and traveling companion, Katherine Howard.

She had been gone all night and hadn't returned.

"So?" Domingo was about to say wearily that in Trinidad a person isn't considered missing until at least fourteen days have elapsed. But the melodious voice hurried on.

"You must realize that Katie would never stay out all night in a strange port. You see we arrived in Port-of-Spain yesterday on the

Carib Queen. After leaving here the ship was scheduled to put in at Tobago and Caracas and then return on its way back to the States. But Katie and I decided to get off and spend the three days here. Then about an hour ago a messenger delivered her lavalier, and oh, I just know something has happened to her . . . ”

“Lavalier?” repeated Domingo.

“A diamond pendant. It was Katie’s pride and joy. According to her it once belonged to Louise de La Valierre, the mistress of Louis XIV. The messenger brought a note with it that said Katie was afraid it would be stolen but didn’t say a word about where she was.”

It so happened that Domingo, as Warrant Inspector for the Trinidad police, pursued a hobby quite out of keeping with his occupation. He collected portrait miniatures. For ten years he had been gathering them, and in addition to a number of excellent prints and copies he had several originals. Last week he had acquired one of a brooding gentleman in a plumed hat, satin breeches and lavender waistcoat. Its title: Louis XIV. Admittedly there was a wide difference between a portrait miniature of a King of France and the pendant of his courtesan. But the coincidence of the same historical personage as mentioned by the woman on the phone caught Domingo’s interest.

“All right,” he said. “I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

THE QUEEN’S PARK, PORT-OF-SPAIN’S MOST FASHIONABLE hotel, across from the Savannah, still maintains its atmosphere of luxury and colonial elegance. Domingo, wearing his habitual suit of rumpled whites, black string tie and rain-wrinkled panama, crossed the dark panelled lobby to the lift and rode up to the sixth floor. He was a smallish man of mixed French and Haitian ancestry. In his youth he had talked with a slight lisp, but he had mastered the impediment and now spoke a clipped English that was almost theatrical in its clarity. At the sixth floor he walked down the corridor and rapped on the door of 602. A tall blonde girl with violet eyes in her early thirties answered his knock.

Inside, she waved the detective to a chair, then without a word dropped a gold necklace into his hands.

It was a beautiful piece of jewelry. A diamond was flanked on either side by an emerald, all set in a delicate gold carving. Even to an untrained eye it bore the mark of a craftsman.

“Katie thought a lot of the lavalier,” Edith Hartwick said. “As I told you it once belonged to Louis XIV’s mistress, who gave her name to all similar pendants. A messenger delivered it to me this morning. You see Katie left the hotel last night about eight o’clock. She simply said she

was going down the street to buy a paperback. Katie always had to read herself to sleep. Me, I can doze off at the drop of a hat, and I guess I did last night because I was dead tired. I didn't know she hadn't come back until this morning when I awoke and saw her bed hadn't been slept in. Then the messenger came with the lavalier and this note." She handed a small sheet of paper torn from a notebook. Upon it was written:

I'm afraid this will be stolen. Katie.

"But not a word about where she was," Edith Hartwick went on.

"Did you ask the messenger?"

"Of course. All he could tell me was that the package had been given him at the South Harbor Marina. I understand that's miles from here."

"Was she alone?"

"The messenger said she was. Anyway Katie didn't know a soul in this port."

"What about the other passengers on your boat?"

Edith Hartwick wrinkled her brow. "Well Katie did meet a man named Mark Partridge. But I'm sure he sailed with the *Carib Queen*. If he didn't, Katie would have told me."

"In case he didn't, what did he look like?"

"Blond. Good looking. If you ask me he was nothing but a con man trying to pick up an extra dollar. Katie knew this and she knew she wasn't likely to attract a handsome bachelor for any other reason. Frankly I don't understand why she didn't cut him off right away."

Domingo got an eyepiece out of his pocket and examined the lavalier again.

"I'd like to take this along," he said. "I'll give you a receipt. Meanwhile if you hear anything more from your friend contact me right away." He gave her his card.

OUTSIDE, DOMINGO GOT INTO HIS 1968 FELANI, DROVE down St. Clair Road and turned at the intersection into Frederick Street, Port-of-Spain's main thoroughfare. He followed Frederick several blocks, waved to his friend and fellow officer, the white-gloved, white-helmeted black man directing traffic, and finally drew up before a small jewelry store whose window bore the name J. Pardino. January heat, thick with humidity, lay like moist gauze over the sidewalk. Inside, closed shutters and humming fans gave a false impression of coolness.

"I saw this thing just last night," Pardino said, turning the lavalier

over in his hands.

"You mean someone brought it in to be appraised? Who?"

"A man and a woman. I'll tell you the same thing I told them. The stones are good quality, but I'm not capable of judging its value as an antique. But if, as the woman said, it goes back to the court of Louis XIV, it should be worth quite a lot."

"What did the man look like?"

"Handsome fellow. The woman called him Mark."

Domingo thanked him, went back out to the Felani and continued on to the Marina. This was a new development, a conversion of what once had been a waterfront slum district. It began as a well lighted area with sidewalk cafes and attractive shops but dwindled into semi-darkness with tumble-down docks and wharves. A number of inquiries led Domingo to a rather seedy restaurant where the messenger who had delivered the lavalier was doing his job as bus boy. Asked whether the woman who gave him the package was alone he nodded and said,

"She was when I saw her. If anybody was with her they must have been on the boat."

"What boat?"

The youth turned and pointed. "That cabin cruiser with the blue hull. I know because I happened to be outside here and I saw her walk over from it. She headed back for it too after she give me the package. She had nice legs," he added.

"What time was that?"

"Last night a little after ten." He fidgeted. "I know I didn't get around to delivering it until this morning, but I had to work a double trick yesterday because Juan was sick and I was done in. I figured it wouldn't make any difference so long as it got there."

Domingo nodded and strode toward the dock the youth had indicated. The blue cruiser, tugging at its moorings and rocking gently in the swell, was not a new boat. A sign tacked to its cabin housing read FOR HIRE. Domingo leaped agilely across the space of open water to the deck. He got a pencil flashlight out of his pocket, opened the companion door and descended the stairs. At the bottom the flash revealed a light switch, and he pressed it.

Brilliancy erupted before him, revealing a scene of confusion. In the center of the cabin a table, ripped from its wall brackets, lay overturned. Books, magazines and dishware littered the floor. The shade of a wall lamp, set in ornamental gimbals, was crushed, exposing the naked bulb. A chair was broken and a pillow from the settee ripped open.

Domingo picked his way carefully through the rubble. Not until he

had advanced well into the cabin did he sight the stain on the carpet and the knife beside it. It was a bone handled table knife. A few feet away was the torn fragment of a woman's print dress. Then he saw what he had overlooked coming in: the trail of blood led across the floor and up the stairs. Also there were deep scratches on the floor, and the blood was smeared, showing obviously that a body had been dragged. Domingo followed the trail back up the stairs and across to the starboard side of the deck. Here he knelt and brought the flash into play again. As he had expected, the light revealed the blood up and over the rail. The detective didn't need a picture to tell him that a body had been thrown overboard. There was something else. In the scuppers was the broken stem of a man's pipe.

Ten minutes later, as he drove back to the St. Vincent Street barracks Domingo ran the developments over in his mind. He hadn't chosen to question the owner of the blue cruiser. Whether or not Partridge had given his right name in signing the boat-rental papers was of no consequence. Whether or not the owner was aware of the struggle that had taken place mattered little. But this fellow Partridge must be a fool if he thought he could get by with murder (and all the signs did point toward murder) on the basis of *Corpus Delicti*. Even if he dumped the body into the waters of South Harbor, as the trail of blood over the rail indicated he had, and even if the body had been swept out to sea by the strong Boca current he could not escape justice. Trinidad was virtually a closed island. It would be impossible for him to leave by plane or by boat without being spotted. Accordingly Domingo posted a pick up order at the ship docks, the Piarco air port, the bus terminal and the island's secondary airport at San Fernando, forty miles down the coast.

THE FOLLOWING DAY, AS HE HAD EXPECTED, THE POLICE drag launch cruised the South Harbor for five hours without finding a body and was still at it when at three in the afternoon Domingo returned to Room 602 at the Queen's Park.

"I've got no news, I'm sorry to say," he told Edith Hartwick. "It might help if you could tell me a little more information about this man, Partridge."

The woman was a little more composed than she had been the morning before. "I'm afraid I don't know too much about him," she said. "He came from the same general area Katie did, Cape Cod. He claimed to be a salesman. Insurance. As I told you yesterday he was about forty, his little finger ended in a stump. His hair came down his forehead in a widow's peak. I always mistrust a man with hair like that."

"Did he smoke a pipe?"

"I think he did." Edith Hardwick paused. "You can be frank with me, Inspector. Katie's dead, isn't she?"

"I haven't said that," Domingo replied. "Now what about your friend? You said she wasn't the kind to attract a handsome bachelor. What did you mean by that?"

Edith Hartwick pushed a hand through her hair. "Three years ago Katie was in a very bad car accident. The crash killed her only sister and left Katie with a disfiguring scar across her face that no plastic surgery could remedy. The whole thing was a needless tragedy. Katie and her sister were returning to Boston from a New Year's party when their car was struck broadside by a hit and run driver. That accident changed Katie's life. She brooded over her sister's death and over her disfigurement. I was the one who persuaded her to take this cruise. I thought it would snap her out of it. But it didn't seem to. In fact she didn't seem interested in anything until she met Mark Partridge, and that rather surprised me. I mean to let herself fall for a man as palpable as he. She was always a very self-sufficient person with a sharp mind and able to take care of herself. But there's no explaining love or infatuation I guess."

Domingo returned the lavalier to her but said nothing about the pendant's value. Before he left he asked one more question.

"Can you tell me where you and Miss Howard went here in Port-of-Spain after you got off the boat?"

Edith Hartwick thought a moment. "Here to the hotel first of course. Then the usual sight-seeing tour. Lunch at the Piedmont. Then Katie went alone to have her hair done. Katie was always very fussy about her hair. She was a flaming red head, you know."

"Where?"

"A place called The Coiffeur. On Compton Lane."

DOMINGO'S NEXT STOP WAS THE LIBRARY. HERE, FOR NO other reason than to satisfy his curiosity, he drew from the shelves a thick volume, *Queens and Mistresses of the Kings of France*. He spent a quarter of an hour scanning its pages.

He then asked to see a January 2nd, 1980 issue of the *New York Times* and was pleasantly surprised to find the library had that newspaper on file. It took him only a moment to find out what he was looking for.

It was a story with a Boston Dateline of a car smash up on the freeway three miles outside of Boston. Two girl occupants were driving in a light weight car when they were struck by a driver who ran a red

light, and who, without compunction made no attempt to stop. If he had stopped he probably could have saved the life of one of the girls. He was known to have been slightly cut by flying glass. Police found a severed finger at the scene but had been unable to trace him although they were sure of the make of his car as attested by paint left on the girl's vehicle.

Domingo pursed his lips as he read this. "I wonder," he said, "if we've been working from the wrong end."

Nevertheless he followed his plan of tracing Partridge's trail from the time he had left the *Carib Queen*. The man had checked in to a second rate hotel. He had gone out shortly after eight after meeting a woman in the lobby. As Domingo had expected, Partridge's room, to which the inspector's authority won him access, was empty of luggage.

The detective left the hotel and drove once again down Frederick Street, heading for Old Compton Road. All the way his mind was going like a millrace as he completely rearranged his line of thought. When he spotted The Coiffeur where Katie had had her hair done he sat there in the idling Felani, gazing at the shop's window display: a double row of blonde and brunette wigs mounted on head forms.

"Damnation!"

Abruptly he gunned the motor, swung away from the curb and made a U turn to the consternation of drivers coming from the opposite direction. At full tilt he drove the fourteen miles down Churchill Roosevelt highway, to the airport. As he entered the terminal he heard the PA announce: "Flight 224, Venezuelan Airlines to New York via Kingston and San Juan. Now boarding, please."

Domingo crossed to the ticket counter, showed his credentials and demanded to see the passenger manifest for the flight just announced. He ran his finger down the list of names, halted at one, and smiled sardonically. A moment later he was on the landing slip asking the stewardess who stood at the entrance of the 227.

"Miss Dubarry. Will you point her out to me?"

The stewardess nodded toward a seat occupied by a young woman with platinum hair. Her face was heavily coated with pan make up. Domingo lifted his hat.

"Miss Howard?"

The woman started. "The name is Dubarry."

Again Domingo smiled that knowing smile. "I'm sorry, Miss Howard. I'll have to ask you to come with me. You're charged with the murder of Mark Partridge."

THE NEXT DAY DOMINGO DISCUSSED THE CASE WITH HIS

Assistant Inspector who had returned that morning from a vacation at Montego Bay. The assistant, a young man new to the Trinidad force, looked across the antiquated roll top desk of his superior and said,

"When did you first suspect it was the woman, Katherine Howard, who murdered Mark Partridge, rather than the other way around?"

Domingo lit a cigar.

"It was of course a prime example of premeditation," he said slowly. "Katie had laid her plans well. Doubtless to a certain extent she was justified in her desire for retaliation. But it was still murder. When she learned that the man responsible for her sister's death and her own disfigurement was aboard the same ship she suddenly became a cold and calculating person, intent only on vengeance. She made sure of her facts first of course, Mark's severed finger and in all probability the make and color of the car he drove and questioned him carelessly but carefully about other details gathered by the Boston police. Then she selected the setting. Somehow she enticed Partridge to take her on a boat, a night cruise of the harbor. A boat would serve as the location for what she must do without danger of observation. It also provided a means of disposing the body. She had no fears of her ability to take care of the latter because she had kept herself in physical condition.

"But first she had to persuade Partridge to visit the jewelry shop and have her lavalier appraised. Her reasoning was two fold: The value of the necklace should further interest Partridge in her financially, an interest which she had carefully fostered by claims of wealth since their meeting on the *Carib Queen*. But more important, when the lavalier was traced and investigated by the police, as it was sure to be, the knowledge of its value by Partridge should even further point to his guilt for the apparent murder of herself. After that she had only to gain entrance to his hotel room and slip down the stairs with his luggage without being observed by the desk clerk. That would cinch the supposition that Partridge had fled after committing the crime.

"But she made the old mistake of trying to hide her identity. The platinum wig held her tell-tale red hair of course and the make up, the scar on her face, and it was easy enough to obtain forged identification. She was, however, a little too imaginative in her choice of a name."

"What do you mean?" the assistant asked.

"Dubarry. Dubarry was the mistress of Louis XV, not Louis XIV. But the historical association was enough to give her away."

The patient wasn't a killer. It was his right hand that was forcing him to do those terrible things!

The Upper Hand

by ALAN WARREN

"I WANT YOU TO CUT OFF MY HAND," THE YOUNG MAN said.

"And why do you want me to do that?" Dr. Morrell asked.

"Because the treatment isn't working."

"How can you be sure?"

"I'm sure."

Dr. James Morrell regarded his patient calmly. He did not look like a man teetering on the verge of insanity. But then, few of Dr. Morrell's patients did. Only in movies did one encounter the wide-eyed drooling psychotic. In real life, the patient was more often withdrawn and uncommunicative.

Dr. Morrell regarded the young man a moment longer, then expelled a sigh.

"Well, I couldn't even if I wanted to," he said. "I'm a psychiatrist. I have no training in surgery."

"Then I'll find a surgeon to do it."

"You won't. Do you think any surgeon would cut off the hand of a perfectly healthy young man?"

Dr. Morrell paused to let this sink in, then said:

"Tell me how it began."

"I've already told you."

"Tell me again."

THE YOUNG MAN, WHOSE NAME WAS MICHAEL DEPACE, heaved an exhausted sigh. He pulled a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and sat quietly a moment, thinking. He was about thirty, with dark hair worn long, dressed in an open-necked shirt, custom-tailored slacks, and expensive Italian boots. But he was giving little thought to his appearance at the moment. From the way he was sitting, he might have been a rag doll that had been flung at the chair and landed in that position.

"OK. I guess it started about a week ago. I was walking around my apartment, and my hand reached out and knocked over an expensive glass figurine. I was really surprised, but I told myself I'd knocked it over with my sleeve. But that wasn't true. It was my hand—it wanted to knock it over."

"Go on," Dr. Morrell said.

DePace took a deep drag off his cigarette.

"OK, later. I was sitting down to dinner with my girlfriend. She's not particularly bright. From time to time she makes inane remarks. She made one during dinner, and I slapped her. She looked up at me, horror—what is the word?—horrorstruck. I was scared, too, not because I'd hit her, but because I'd had no intention of hitting her. None at all. The hand had done it."

"Don't you think these are merely psychological—"

The young man held up his left hand.

"I'm not done yet. Next day I was with my partner, discussing my radio show. He made a remark about one of our guests, a young lady. The gist was that I was sleeping with her. It wasn't insulting. Just the opposite, in fact. Kind of gloating. But I turned on him, got my hand around his throat. I wanted to strangle him."

"With just your right hand?"

DePace held up his right hand and stared hard at it.

"Yes. I tried to stop myself, tried to pry off my right hand with my left. No good. Roger began to choke, and I remember thinking: *I'm going to kill him, I'm going to choke him to death.* I accepted this very calmly. It didn't seem to scare or even surprise me."

"What happened then was that our producer came running in and

pulled us apart. When I finally got my hand free of his throat, I lost the urge to kill him. My hand just fell to my side."

DePace let his hand fall to his thigh, then turned to stare at the doctor.

"I suppose you're going to tell me that subconsciously I wanted to kill Roger, that I transferred all my aggression to my right hand so I couldn't blame myself?"

"I didn't say that. You did."

"Yeah? Well, it's crap. I had no reason to kill Roger."

"Isn't it possible you might have a jealousy of your partner, a feeling of inferiority? Isn't it—"

"I'm still not finished," the young man said.

Dr. Morrell nodded and said nothing.

DePace took a last drag off his cigarette, stubbed it out in an ashtray, and lit another.

"A few days after the attack on Roger, I was out walking," he said. "I'd decided to take some time off, and I did a lot of walking around, thinking. I guess I'd just about convinced myself there wasn't anything wrong with my hand, that it was all nerves brought on by overwork, when this woman coming down the street with a little girl passed by me."

He shook his head as if to wipe away the memory.

"Well, I made a lunge for the little girl. Like a wild dog. But it wasn't me, do you understand? *It was the hand.* I wanted to get the hand around her throat and squeeze and squeeze until there was nothing, no air, no breath. I would have done it, but the mother started screaming and, thank God, two men on the street came running over and, between them, they dragged me off. Then I tried to strangle one of the men. Finally, a cop arrived and put handcuffs on me.

"And that's another strange thing. Even after the handcuffs were on, the hand wouldn't stop. It couldn't stay still. It wanted to be free of the handcuff. It scraped against it, over and over."

The young man held up his hand, and now Dr. Morrell saw the flesh around the wrist was inflamed and raw from being repeatedly rubbed against hard metal.

"That's it so far," DePace said. "How do I know what the hand'll do tomorrow? Maybe the next time I feel like attacking someone—or, rather, the hand feels like it, there won't be anyone around to stop me. I don't want to kill anyone."

He exhaled.

"It's a crazy feeling. Like being aware an accident is about to happen right in front of you, and not being able to do a damn thing about it."

DePace had neglected his cigarette, which had grown a fine gray ash inches long. DePace pushed the ashtray away, then sat back in his chair and said, "I don't suppose you can help me."

Dr. Morrell made a supplicating gesture with his hands. "I don't know what you can expect me to do."

"Take my hand off. Take it clean off." It was the first time Michael DePace had begged for anything in his life.

"You know I can't do that."

DePace stood up.

"Then I'll find someone who can," he said.

Before Dr. Morrell could say anything, the young man turned on his heel and was gone.

When he heard the door to his outer office open and close Dr. Morrell leaned back in his chair and smiled.

It had worked. Despite the number of potential flaws, his plan had worked!

AT 4:15 THAT AFTERNOON DR. MORRELL WENT HOME, entered his study, took out the bottle of Napoleon brandy he kept for special occasions, and poured himself an uncharacteristically generous glass. As he sat sipping the brandy he reflected on the matter of Mr. Michael DePace.

Where had he first heard his name? From Christina, of course. It was the name she had been mumbling over and over when her roommate had broken in and found her stretched out on the bed, semiconscious, about to go into convulsions from the bottle of sleeping tablets she'd swallowed. Her roommate—thank God—had had sense enough to dial the emergency number, and within minutes paramedics had arrived and pumped Christina's stomach. Dr. Morrell had been notified and had come to see her in the hospital. Seeing him, she had broken into tears and sobbed out the story of her affair with DePace and how it had abruptly ended when he had decided there were other fish in the ocean.

At that moment Dr. Morrell had decided he would take revenge on Mr. Michael DePace, though he was not sure how. That came later, after much thought.

It was ironic, because Dr. Morrell realized he was in a nearly perfect position to pull it off. For months he had been experimenting with what he called Subliminal Audio Perception, and his tests so far had been successful. It was based on a once widely-practiced science involving a message flashed on a movie screen for a fraction of a second, so briefly the viewer was not consciously aware of seeing it during the showing of a film. The results had been bountiful: if the message had read

“Drink—” (followed by the name of a soft drink), virtually all viewers receiving the message got the sudden urge to go out and buy that soft drink.

The Federal Communications Commission had banned subliminal advertising, realizing how effective it could be in areas such as politics, and so this science had gone into limbo though some adherents like Dr. Morrell remained. Morrell's particular refinement of this discovery was an audio technique he had been experimenting with: the listener would take home a tape of Bach, Beethoven, or the Beatles and hear only the music, while underneath would be a subliminal message addressed directly to that listener.

So far, Dr. Morrell had not experimented with a subject. But, sitting in his study one night after visiting Christina in the hospital, he decided Mr. Michael DePace would make the ideal guinea pig.

First, he slipped into DePace's apartment, which had proved surprisingly easy, and took away a shelfful of tapes. Onto each tape containing prerecorded music he had dubbed a message barely perceptible to the human ear:

“Your hand is no longer part of you. It has a will of its own. It is alive. It has an urge to murder someone, to grip them around the throat. You cannot resist this urge. You will be compelled to attack someone whenever you are in a public place, or whenever you are in a room with three or more people present. When you realize it is your foul, detestable, noxious right hand doing this, you will consult Dr. James Morrell, a psychiatrist, in the hope that he will be able to treat you. Dr. James Morrell. And if he cannot help you, then your only hope is to cut it off, just as you would a diseased organ. Find someone to remove it. If no one will help you, remove it yourself.”

And after that, events proceeded more or less on schedule. There had been some agonizing doubts when two weeks passed and Dr. Morrell didn't hear from DePace or read anything about him in the papers, but then the call had come. Acting the role of the cool professional, Dr. Morrell had dispensed advice and reassurances with practiced ease while DePace sweated it out.

Dr. Morrell had just helped himself to a second glass of brandy when his phone rang.

“Hello?”

“Jim? This is Sanford, over at Emergency.”

“Yes, what is it?”

“We have a man here, name's Michael DePace. Claims to be a patient of yours. Really wacko. He went to a Dr. Winniger and evidently told him his hand was alive. Wanted Winniger to cut it off.

Nothing wrong with the hand that Winniger could see, so naturally he refused."

It was all Dr. Morrell could do to keep from laughing out loud. He snickered, and Sanford said, "Anything the matter, doctor?"

"No, no. Just a slight cold. Go on."

"Well, DePace went out and bought a meat cleaver and did the job himself. Took his hand off just above the wrist."

"This comes at a bad time," said Dr. Morrell: "I'm just getting ready to visit my daughter in Mexico. We're going on vacation together. I've been looking forward to it for some time."

"Oh. Well, I just thought you'd want to know."

"Thank you for telling me."

"Have a good trip."

Dr. Morrell smiled.

"I intend to."

DR. MORRELL LEFT FOR MEXICO CITY TWO DAYS LATER. In the cab on the way to the airport he listened to DePace's radio show and, again, found himself unable to control his mirth.

"Anything wrong, sir?" the taxi driver asked.

"No, nothing. Just a cough that won't go away."

Christina met him at the airport. As promised, they spent most of their time together. Christina did not mention Michael DePace or her suicide attempt, and for the first time in years she seemed, if not happy, at least at peace.

Dr. Morrell, too, was content. It was his first vacation in years, and he was satisfied to sit on the patio outside their hotel suite, sipping a Mai Tai and watching the waves lapping the shore.

There was a discreet rap at the door.

"Come in," Dr. Morrell said.

The bellboy entered, carrying a tray containing lunch. Under his arm was that day's edition of the *Los Angeles Times*. Very carefully, the boy set the tray down on a table, the newspaper beside it.

"*Muchas gracias*," Dr. Morrell said. He fumbled in his pocket for a tip, dug out a twenty-peso note, and put it in the boy's hand.

"*Gracias, señor*," the bellboy said, and hurried out.

Dr. Morrell set his Mai Tai down, picked up the paper and unfolded it. He glanced briefly at the headlines, then scanned the other stories.

Suddenly he sat bolt upright.

A minute later he was on the telephone, dialing his office in Los Angeles. The line was busy. He dialed again, thinking: *The tapes, the goddamned tapes! With DePace recovering in the hospital, they'd*

substituted one of the tapes he kept at home for his regular broadcast! And now everyone was calling his, Morrell's, office, just as the subliminal voice had instructed them to do.

Dr. Morrell finally got an operator.

"I'm sorry," she said. "The line is busy. Can you hold?"

"Yes, I'll hold."

As he waited, Dr. Morrell stared down at the newspaper. The three-column story on page one reported that thousands of local residents were swamping the telephone lines of hospitals and clinics, but most particularly the offices of James Morrell, all insisting their right hands were alive and had wills of their own. Many people, already numbering in the hundreds, had already cut their own hands off at the wrist. Reports were still coming in from Los Angeles, Van Nuys, Santa Monica, and even as far away as Sacramento.

I'll have to get ahold of Sanford and broadcast some kind of message, Morrell was thinking. Something to straighten things out. Otherwise, everyone who listened will be thinking of . . .

"The line is free now, sir," the operator said. "Whom did you wish to speak to?"

Everyone who listened to . . .

"Sir? The line is free now. Sir? Hello?"

But Dr. Morrell was no longer listening. He put the handset down. He was staring very intently at his right hand and at the slim white wrist that connected it to his body . . .

AT LAST!

After being lost for more than forty years, the film you've always wanted to see:

CASABLANCA

starring Ronald Reagan and Ann Sheridan

is coming to a theater or drive-in near you. Don't miss it!

No one could put anything over on Lydia, and this new romance of her daughter's would be no exception!

Nobody's Fool

by HELENE O'SHEA

VERY FEW PEOPLE HAD EVER GOTTERN THE BETTER OF Lydia McCandless. Certainly not her ex-husband who had left her for a younger woman years ago. He had been paying for the privilege of a divorce ever since. And not just financially either—the settlement had been generous indeed—but through limited access to his daughter.

Certainly not the developer of this expensive, but poorly constructed condominium apartment she lived in now. Lydia had been astute enough to insist on a six months' lease to decide if she really liked condominium living. And in the four months she had been here, she had noted the ill-fitting doors, the drafty windows, and the influx of outside noises. The pool, however, was as luxurious as advertised, and Lydia and Darley made extensive use of it.

And Lydia determined, not for the first time, neither would Maurice Hastings get the better of her. Maurice had his forty-year-old eyes trained on Darley. Whether it was her youthful vivacity, her stunning beauty, or her money that most attracted Maurice, Lydia would think of a plan to thwart him.

She was putting her mind to it when a key in the triply locked door heralded the arrival of Darley herself. No scholar, Darley attended summer classes at the university to make up those credits that her first year had ended lacking. At least she wasn't forced into one of the dorms there. Darley's apartment on campus was as uncomfortable, if smaller, as the one Lydia had in mind to move into when her lease here expired in two months.

So why didn't the girl stay in it? Lydia knew the answer. Darley drove her little sports car ninety miles one way, more evenings than not, to spend the night here, because Maurice lived only one floor down. Darley had not inherited her mother's shrewd mind, and she was smitten with the older man. Darley would slip into her minuscule swim suit, and within minutes of her appearing on the redwood deck around the pool, she would be joined by Maurice.

"Hello, Mother!" Darley's caroling tone elicited a cheerful

response. If Lydia loved anyone, it was her beautiful daughter, as radiantly cheerful, as sweetly personable as she was lovely.

"It was so hot at school." Darley might not be brilliant, but she was too smart to announce her real reason for coming home. She had enough native intelligence to recognize the animosity that existed between her suitor and her mother. "Why don't we both put our suits on, and go down to the pool?"

An invitation Lydia was bound to refuse. While she had kept her figure, still she was a generation older than Darley, and she had no wish to invite comparisons from the old cats around the pool. Darley put on a terry robe over her wisp of a suit, and left the apartment. Her mother fell back into brooding over the problem.

IT WASN'T JUST THAT MAURICE WASN'T GOOD ENOUGH for Darley. Most men fell far short of expectations, and it would be difficult to find one who could meet Lydia's exacting standards for a son-in-law. Maurice, Lydia had reason to suspect, wasn't any good at all.

She knew that the condominium he occupied was not his own at all, but had been lent by a wealthy uncle, reputably tired of financing Maurice's excesses. The uncle had considered that six months in the company of the wealthy residents of the Waterford-Williams Condominium Complex should suffice for Maurice to find and wed a wealthy woman, who would then be liable for his bills. Already, he had been rejected by a stockbroker's daughter, as well as the young widow of a prominent plastic surgeon. Even if Lydia had told Darley this common gossip, though, the girl would never listen. Too headstrong. No, there must be a subtler plan, and Lydia would soon think of it.

And that night she had the first glimmering of an idea.

ONCE LYDIA HAD HAD DATES APLENTY. BUT AFTER IT became apparent that she would never endanger her alimony payments by remarrying, and her waspish tongue had driven off even the most persevering escorts, Lydia's social outings were conducted solely in the company of other women. Tonight she was accompanying Celia Morris and Rachel Manning to a dinner club, newly opened just across the state line. Rachel drove and Celia chattered from the back seat.

Lydia paid little attention. Her mind was still back in the apartment where Darley had picked at the meal Lydia had had sent up from the restaurant. "I guess I'll drive back tonight." Darley's tan was perhaps half a degree deeper, but apparently that was all she had accomplished at poolside. "Everybody in the whole complex has gone out of town."

Which Lydia had taken to mean that Maurice was not presently in residence.

Lydia had missed what Celia was saying about the dinner act at the place they were going this evening. She didn't want to ask Celia to repeat. It hardly mattered. A good meal in pleasant surroundings was what interested her this evening.

However the entertainment turned out to be a hypnotist, a tall, broad man, who had cultivated a Mephistophelean look with beard, moustache and eyebrows whose luxuriant growth was not entirely natural. He came on the stage just as Lydia and her two companions had been served their second round of drinks, and it was obvious that Celia and Rachel were completely beguiled by him. The minute he called for volunteers, they jumped up, ready to desert both their drinks and Lydia. Since their table was so close to the stage, they had an advantage over the other diners, and were chosen. Lydia sipped her drink and watched closely as her friends, two men, and two other women—one quite young—submitted to hypnosis. The hypnotist dangled a gold coin, polished to a lustrous finish to catch every errant beam of light which penetrated the dimness of the room, and spoke slowly, but too softly for Lydia to catch his words. It took him only minutes to have both Rachel and Celia apparently dozing in their straight-backed chairs, and one of the men and the very young girl followed suit. The second man and the other woman were invited politely to step down off the stage.

In Lydia's opinion, Celia and Rachel both made fools of themselves, as did the man, revolving like tops, holding their hands in an arch over their heads, and turning in circles in grotesque imitation of a ballerina. The young girl was at least charming, her movements graceful, and the crowd applauded in appreciation. Lydia's companions returned to the table giggling and simpering over their roles in the entertainment, and Lydia barely managed to speak civilly to them. When asked her opinion of their performance, she held back sharp words because an idea had been born in the back of her mind.

When the meal was finished, Lydia mentioned in a throwaway manner that it would be instructive sometime to chat with a hypnotist. As she had known they would, the others greeted the remark with enthusiasm and insisted that they all should pay a visit backstage and meet tonight's performer.

The backstage area was crowded with the club's patrons, and the entertainer was expanding visibly. "Of course, the very strong-minded," he indicated the woman who had been invited to leave the stage, "are unable to enjoy the benefits of hypnotism. One must

subject his will to mine. For those who do that, the rewards can be great. An end to bad habits, weight loss . . . ”

Lydia thought the speech was part of the act, but interesting. She edged closer, and made copious mental notes as the man talked on. First total relaxation, the gold coin helpful in focusing the attention, and allowing the body to achieve this drowsy stage, then sleep, and hypnosis was complete.

THE FOLLOWING DAY FOUND LYDIA SEARCHING THE antique shops in a neighborhood far from her usual haunts, to find as close a duplicate as possible, of the coin the hypnotist had used. When she finally found something suitable, the cost astounded her, but she paid for it in cash. She felt superstitiously that the fewer clues she left to the nature of her scheme, the greater its chances of success.

Not once did Lydia question the right or wrong of her plan to hypnotize Darley, and plant in her mind doubts about Maurice, doubts which she hoped would flower into rejection.

She was disappointed to hear from her daughter by way of a telephone call, that there would be no visit tonight, nor tomorrow. But Darley expected to be home for the weekend. Lydia spent the evening polishing her coin and her plan. That night she lay awake and blamed her wakefulness on the sound of sirens. Another mark against this building: its “U” shape seemed to capture sound and funnel it up the walls. A siren a mile away sounded like it was in the same block. Lydia decided to complain to the management once more, and fell asleep.

When Darley came home Friday evening, Lydia kept an unobtrusive eye out until Darley fell into an old habit: nail biting. “Darley, that’s such an unlovely habit. I wish you could break it.” Darley looked up in puzzlement. “Nail biting, I mean, dearest. Haven’t you noticed that you seem to be getting worse about it?”

Darley examined her hands and shrugged. She really didn’t know if she bit her nails more or less than previously. Nor did Lydia, but she needed some reason to introduce Darly to hypnosis.

Her fear that Darley would be repulsed was ungrounded. As soon as her mother presented the idea, Darley agreed with alacrity. Some of the kids at school had tried it as a study device, but Darley hadn’t, mostly because she had a fear of being ridiculed, made to look foolish. With her mother as hypnotist and sole witness, though, she need not worry. She could trust Lydia.

Darley was an excellent subject. Lydia did not allow herself to speculate that this was a sign of inferior intelligence, but told herself that Darley was amenable to suggestion.

A few remarks made while her daughter was "under" assured Lydia that the girl would be a willing subject for another session, so after making a few assertions about Maurice's character, she felt she had accomplished enough for a first session. Only as an afterthought did she warn Darley against nail biting, and then "brought her out."

DARLEY WAS VERY QUIET OVER THE WEEKEND, AND Lydia congratulated herself on the remarkable efficacy of her plan. Obviously Darley was mulling over the ideas that had been planted in her mind. She visited the pool, and Lydia watched and saw Maurice join her almost immediately. From the vile look he gave her when they met in the elevator, she was assured that her plan was working, but slowly. Maurice's charm was a powerful antidote to Lydia's poisoning of Darley's mind against him.

After two weeks, Lydia found that by using her voice alone, she could produce a trance in Darley without the girl being aware of it, as long as she kept the trance brief. Such power made her impatient for the final success of her plan.

And then the blow fell: on a Friday evening, Darley returned from the pool, her long blonde hair wrapped in damp tendrils around her neck and shoulders, her eyes glowing. "Mother," she greeted Lydia, "I'm so happy. I've been so bothered about Maurice. I've been hearing . . . I can't remember where . . ." a faint look of puzzlement clouded her lovely face, ". . . really awful things about him and I didn't know whether to believe them or not. So today I asked him. He said they were all true and I should believe them. But that's all in the past. To be worthy of my love, Maurice has changed his whole life, has become a different person. Tonight we're going to have dinner in his apartment, and he says he has a very important question to ask me." She turned the full force of her smile on her mother. "I think he wants to marry me."

Lydia was stunned. Too late she saw where she had erred. Instead of making Darley aware of Maurice's shortcomings, she should have worked on the girl's own feelings. Perhaps it was not too late even now.

"Darley, don't you want to lie down for a few minutes. You will want to look your best for this evening."

Unquestionably obedient, Darley lay in a lounge on the balcony, and five minutes later, Lydia could see she was in a deep trance.

"Can you hear me, Darley?" Lydia spoke rapidly. No telling how long Darley would stay under, and she must say everything she had planned. As the girl nodded that she could hear, Lydia rushed on. "Darley, you realize now that you do not love Maurice. You detest

him. Tonight you'll tell him so. You never want to see him again. You'll make him believe that. You will do whatever you have to, to make him believe it. Then you'll come right home and get ready for bed, and when you wake up, you won't remember any of it, but you will remember that you hate Maurice." The girl was stirring uneasily. Lydia thought it best to bring her out of the trance.

As Darley dressed in her new white dress, she was quiet. Lydia sat in the living room, listening to her movements as she prepared for her evening. Lydia was a bit troubled by the look in Darley's eyes, but she comforted herself that this was all for the best. Perhaps in years to come, she would tell Darley how her mother had saved her from a disastrous marriage. Perhaps when Darley was married to some fine man, and had one or two little ones. Or maybe she would never tell . . . no, she definitely would not, she decided as the girl left the apartment.

Lydia went early to bed, but found herself unable to sleep. She was reluctant to take sleeping pills. She wanted to be alert if Darley needed her when she returned home.

IT WAS LATER THAN LYDIA THOUGHT IT WOULD BE, when she heard the key in the lock. It was too dark to read the bedside clock, but Lydia felt that it was very late. Darley seemed to be crying or whimpering as she locked the apartment door behind herself, and headed straight for the bathroom.

Lydia was undecided whether or not to go to her. But the girl's voice continued to rise and fall, and its disturbed cadence soon brought Lydia out of bed. As she reached for her robe, the sound of sirens again reached her ears, and she muttered an oath.

Darley had not turned on the bathroom light. But the reflection of the lights in the center court cast a dim glow up here, and Lydia could see her silhouette bending over the vanity, dipping a cloth into the sink. And she could hear Darley's voice, only somehow, not Darley's voice, still rising and falling, and as she reached for the light switch, she could make out the words.

"I did what I had to do to convince Maurice that I hated him . . . I did what I had to do . . ." And then rising almost to a shriek, "But now I can't get the stains out."

From the courtyard, the light grew, and now a dimension was added. Color. Red. Flashing off and on, throwing unnatural shadows. And as the fluorescent light flickered into delayed life, Lydia saw the other red, big blotches of it, staining Darley's new white dress.

The Kid had had eleven straight KOs in a row. His opponent, Gramps, hadn't won a bout since Custer lost to an out-of-town Sioux. It was obvious who the winner would be. And yet, and yet . . .

The Indispensable Man

by ARTHUR MOORE

"HE CAN'T LOSE," I SAY AS CASUAL AS POSSIBLE. A bundle on the Kid's nose is a cinch bet."

Gospel Keely looks over his cheaters at me. "Kid Torres you mean, friend Dubois?"

Me and him have been puttering in Picarro's Poolroom for the last pile of minutes picking at the pending pugilistic possibilities between gramps Grubb and the Kid, but that is like Gospel. He never takes nothing for granted. Especially when there is dough in the deliberations.

"Kid Torres," I confirm. "Shorty, his manager, tells me the Kid is trained so sharp he could take on a tugboat if it could make the weight."

Gospel studies me sidelong as like he is sizing me up. "Shorty," he

intones, "is an excellent judge of the capabilities of them in the sporting dodge. I would always agree with that stated assessment. Never in those of the sky above nor the earth below have mine eyes beheld a more fit specimen."

He taps his nose while Honker sights along his cue stick. Honker is the local shark and nine-ball champ as far west as Perth Amboy. He is able to make a living from the fact that he looks like an unemployed Easter bunny. I watch respectfully while he sinks the shot. I am pondering a plan the plot of which is propped up by Gospel. I have got to figure which way he is gonna vote on the Kid Torres-Gramps bout so I can do likewise and the same.

Gospel is a tall bazoo with a face like a battered beagle who has suffered great disappointments. He has little squinty eyes under bushy gray eyebrows which slide up and down like two bundles of skittish straw and his bass voice sounds mostly like he is going to announce the end of the world any second.

"Fit specimens is Shorty's bread and butter," I remark. But I am thinking that ever since this fistic enterprise has been bruited about there is something shady in Scandanavia. The big bout is being held in the Dakinberry Legion Hall and four other fights are scheduled. Lightweights, confettiweights and the main event which is Gramps and the Kid who are heavies.

I am cagy that it could be fixed because Kid Torres is a tough young tiger who can punch holes in a battleship with either hand. But Gramps is an old timer who has made the mistake in public of mentioning his five-rounder with Gentleman Jim Corbett. That would make him forty years older than the Statue of Liberty, and not quite as good with the footwork.

Gramps must be promised a politician's pension or something equally stupendous to get him to step into the ring with the Kid.

The Kid's nose is plainly the only schnoz to lay my moo on, but from past experience with Gospel all that glitters is not necessarily geetus or golden gelt. Like mentioned, my plan is to spread my butter on the same side of the bread that he does, but I am surprised and suspicious that he is being so silent. I do not recall that he has been reluctant to name his choice before.

"Magic, sorcery and fascination," says Gospel admiringly as Honker waves the cue stick and the balls disappear into their holes. I catch him eyeing me again so I wad up the Jackson I am nursing in my pants' pocket and get a good lie ready about how I am flatter than the dimples on a dime in case he is angling for a touch.

"Kid Torres," I prod him, "has had eleven straight KOs in a row."

He nods distantly. "True, little friend Dubois, true. The Kid is a natural. He is sheer poetry in the squared circle."

"Then you are backing that notion with scratch-of-the-realm?"

He grasps both lapels of his black coat and teeters on his heels. "Gramps is a gladiator of renown," he says, drawing out the words and making them sound reasonable. "Ring experience cannot be bought, Dubois. Experience is the great reservoir wherein them who have same pluck the pearls which are so richly theirs. Gramps has survived many a grievous grapple and grunt."

"Gramps," I inform him, "is a tanker who could go maybe three rounds with a one-legged posy peddler of the female gender! He has not won a bout since Custer lost in the first to an out-of-town Sioux, and he cannot count beyond seven which is the highest number he has ever heard a referee pronounce before the lights went out."

Honker winks at me between shots and Gospel takes off the cheaters to examine them against the light. "You paint a dismal picture of Gramps' proclivities, Dubois. You may be in for a surprise."

I am uneasy about that big word which I suspect Gospel has just made up for the occasion. I shrug it off. "Well, if they are as creaky as the rest of him the Kid will bend them outta shape too. You ain'tbettin' on Gramps, are you?"

He steps away from the table so Honker can line up his next string of magical manipulations. "I will endeavor," he mourns, "to shy from a place bet. Look upon the truth and listen not to the magpies who chatter idle whimsy in the land . . ."

"B-but, Kid Torres can't lose!"

"Ahhh, then hustle thy hunch, little friend." He taps his big nose again, gives me a mysterious wink and sighs as he watches Honker hang up his stick and collect folding frogsskins from the mark who has been chalking his cue and doing nothing else with it. The mark shakes his head and stumbles off muttering to himself.

"You mean you *ain't* betting on the Kid?"

Gospel starts for the door. "A wishful may wager either way," he tells me. "Gramps will win if the Kid loses. And vice versa."

"Information as good as that," I yell after him, "I could get from any statue in the park!"

He does not answer, so I follow him out the door and around the corner to Katzie's Saloon. Maybe I am not smart enough to parlay the rent money into two figures but I have doped out that nobody has ever known to empty old Gospel's pockets in an encounter of chance. He is more slippery than a gross of glass eyeballs in a bucket of clam chowder.

WHEN I GO IN HE IS STANDING AT THE BAR CLICKING A coin on the mahogany to attract Jonesy, the bartender. "Beer," he says, "the fruit of the hops and quencher of thirst. What is the odds on the Gramps-Torres fight?"

Jonesy draws one. He is a fat, dish-faced dumbo with a little quivery moustache. "One to ten on the Kid." He grins like it is foolish to ask. "The smart dough says Gramps will hand over the towel with the Ref's instructions."

Gospel nods solemnly as I slide onto a stool and spring for a stein. I say, "Gramps has to use a white cane to find the curb. They shouldn't ought to let him near the ring. When he ain't hearing bells he is ducking birds. He could sprain his back from hittin' that canvas tomorrow night."

Jonesy stares at me. "With all his practice?"

"Dubois," says Gospel, "is touting Torres."

Jonesy leans on an elbow. "Who ain't?"

"It should be a most and very interesting match, gents," Gospel comes close to smiling. "A real eye-opener." He lifts his glass polite. "To the winner. To the gladiator who shall emerge victorious to the plaudits of his peers." He drains the stein in one gulp and lifts his black hat an inch. "Good day, neighbors . . ." He moves to the door like he is walking behind the hearse.

Jonesy changes arms and watches him disappear. He rubs his chin and the moustache quivers. "He ain'tbettin' on Gramps, is he?"

"Beats the resin outta me. He has been acting strange and odd. We just come from the poolroom where Honker is trimmin' a tourist and Gospel was staring into space and not layin' a side bet."

"Yeah?" Jonesy bites his lip. "That is peculiar . . ." He cudgels his forehead at me and I can tell he is troubled. "I never seen Gospel like that. Maybe he knows something." A thought comes to him. "You don't suppose Kid Torres broke his arm, do you?"

"One arm ain't enough," I say, guzzling the beer. "He would have to be blind to boot, to lose to Gramps—and the ref would be sure to notice."

"Yeah." Jonesy is worrying his weak chin again. "But there is something negative in Norway. Gospel is too smart to bet on the Kid—the odds aren't worth it."

I nod and stare at the stein. It stares back.

"Listen!" Jonesy says, grabbing my lapel. "Listen! Maybe the Kid is gonna take a dive!"

The idea shocks me to the socks. Even the stein looks startled. "The Kid takin' a dive!" The proposition is preposterous!

But Jonesy is serious. "You know Gospel," he hisses. "That old coot never misses a con. There is something smelly in Stockholm . . ."

"But why should the Kid throw the fight? He can win just by wavin' his glove in Gramps' face. The wind will knock him down."

"Dubois," sneers Jonesy, "you are dumber than a dead dingbat. It ain't a case of winning—it's the moolah! Lookit the odds! Kid Torres and that manager of his, Shorty, will borrow every buck from Boston to Bangkok and bet it in the boonies . . . on Gramps!" Jonesy is jumping up and down with excitement. "They will spread the geetus around like mustard on a pizza, gettin' back twenty for one—maybe more by fight time. Then the Kid will do a half-gainer before Gramps can stumble over his own feet. Gramps will win the fight, but the Kid and Shorty will be as loaded as a four-barreled shotgun! They will buy Florida and sit on their verandas for the next hundred years!"

I am paralyzed with this portentous proposition. I have never heard such a sure-fire scam! The idea of Gramps winning a non-fixed fight is naturally foolish; he cannot outpunch a lambchop. I blink at Jonesy and he grins like an accordion.

"It is a fact," he says in a funny voice, "that Gospel and Shorty, the Kid's manager, is closer than the cold cream on a chorus girl's clavicle."

"It is true, and I nod weakly. "Yeah, Gospel told me at the poolroom that he just come from the gym."

"Then that's it!" Jonesy slaps the bar. He squints around with his snoop-shaped eyes, and jabs a finger at me. "We're keepin' this hot info between us. You lock your lip till after the last round."

"You're faded," I tell him and slide off the stool. I charge out to scare up loose scratch to bet. My first stop is the Turf Club to look for a feckless mark. I am able to boost several citizens for a total of ten clams after I swear them to secrecy on the upcoming scam. So with the Jackson in my pocket I am plunking thirty green ones on the quaking nose of Gramps, the man of experience.

THE NEXT DAY, JUST BEFORE THE FIGHT, I SIDLE INTO Katzie's Saloon and Jonesy calls me over. His moustache is jittery and he is grumpy as a Bishop with a busted bingo game. He grabs me. "I am hearin' talk, even from tourists, about this swan dive. Dubois, you have dropped a monkey wrench into the beans."

I protest and demur. I have told only ten touts and a taxi driver. Then I spot Gospel at a corner table wiping his cheaters. I tell Jonesy, "If Gospel wised to the fix ain't it logical that we ain't the only smart ones?"

Jonesy grunts. "But the odds on Gramps is way down."

He lets me go and I slide over to Gospel's table. He lifts his black hat at me.

"Sit down, friend Dubois," he intones, like the funeral is over and we are ready for the Wake. "The merrier be this festive occasion if you will join me in a spot of lager."

"You are buying?"

He nods and calls Jonesy over. "Another beer for this indispensable amigo. And turn up the radio."

Jonesy gives me a look but he shuffles away and fiddles with the dial. It is time for the big bout.

"What's indispensable mean?" I ask.

Gospel wrinkles his baggy face which is as close to a smile as he gets. "It means essential." He sips the beer and we listen to the ref giving instructions to Gramps and Kid Torres.

The fact that Gospel has sprung for a Stein is warming the cockles of my heart—whatever they are. He is looking as pleased as an undertaker with a massacre on his front lawn. Jonesy leans on the radio and the first round is announced.

And the fight is over.

Kid Torres flattens Gramps in the first instant of the beginning second. The round bell is still ringing when Gramps hits the canvas. The crowd gasps and Jonesy looks like he has been squashed by a truck. I sit with my mouth open, staring at Gospel who is still sipping the lousy lager. "He won!" I wheeze. "Kid Torres won!"

Gospel lifts a trick eyebrow at me and squints like he thinks I am punchy. "Of course he won!"

"B-b—but—but the f-fix!"

"What fix?" Gospel says. "Don't tell me you bet on Gramps!?"

I am too shook to reply or even answer. It is suddenly clear to me that old Gospel has took us again for a fast shuffle. He knew all the time Gramps couldn't win. I look at Jonesy who has his head on the bar and is shaking like he might be crying.

Gospel says, "Let me buy you another beer, Dubois. You are the indispensable man. You have made an otherwise unprofitable encounter bare fruit."

"Huh?" I say. "How?"

"You have been most helpful in getting the odds even so it was possible to make a buck on the Kid."

The bomb was set to go off at twelve noon, and Carlos wanted to be far away at that time. Trouble was, fate seemed determined to arrange things in a different manner!

Full Circle

by A.M. LIGHTNER

CARLOS HURRIED ALONG THE STREET, HOLDING THE OLD brown valise slightly away from his body and above the sidewalk so that it would not bump. He felt honored to be selected for this mission, but since he knew what was in the case, he took particular pains that it should not touch his body.

It was now almost a year since he had joined the organization for his homeland's independence and this was the first big job he had been given. It showed that the leaders trusted him, and he hoped he would prove worthy. All he had to do was leave the suitcase against the wall of the police precinct. He need not even carry it inside. But he must place it inconspicuously, where nobody would notice it before the powerful bomb exploded. He had studied the place beforehand and picked out a corner behind the steps, where it could hardly be seen by those entering the building.

Carlos joined a small group of people waiting for the bus that would

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take them downtown. He knew he had plenty of time. The bomb was set for noon and it was still early morning. Two young girls were chattering together and an older man was reading a book. Carlos stood a little to one side where he would not be noticed.

Suddenly, from around the corner ran a group of noisy teenagers. One pushed the older man so he fell in the gutter and the others ripped chains from the girls' necks. There were screams and curses and somebody yelled for the police. Carlos tried to duck out of the way, but a boy grabbed his suitcase.

"Let go, jerk, if you don' wanna get hurt!"

Carlos pulled with his right hand and aimed a blow with his left, but the youngster ducked and the valise was jerked from Carlos' grip.

"You don't want that!" he yelled, running after the fleeing boy. To Carlos' horror, the kid seemed no more than thirteen.

In a matter of minutes, the child gang had vanished, each running in a different direction. The girls were still screaming, the older man was picking himself up off the sidewalk, and Carlos was standing with his mouth open and his thoughts in a whirl.

The police arrived and tried to assess the damage. Two gold chains lost, an elderly man slightly bruised. "And you, sir? What did they get from you?"

"He had a suitcase," said the man. "Probably worth more than anything else they got."

"That so? What was in it, sir? Anything valuable? Will you describe it for us?"

"It doesn't matter," Carlos stammered. "Really, there was nothing much in it." All he wanted was to get away from the police.

But the cops had other ideas. "Come along, we're taking you all to the station. Maybe you can identify the perpetrators from pictures. We're trying to crack down on this sort of thing."

Nobody wanted to go to the station, but they were politely urged into the police car. Carlos thought it best to submit. Too many objections might rouse suspicions.

THE BOY WITH THE SUITCASE RAN UNTIL HIS BREATH WAS almost gone. Then, satisfied there were no followers, he paused on a doorstep and tried to open the case. It seemed to be well locked and he decided to take it to his fence who would be able to open it and reward him. He hurried down a back street and into a pawn shop, where he found a line of customers waiting for the owner's attention.

As he sat on a bench by the door, two toughs came in, swinging guns and announcing a hold-up. One pushed up front, ordering everyone to

lie on the floor and demanding the contents of the cash box. The boy turned to duck out the door, but the second tough was guarding it and grabbed him by the collar.

"Where do you think you're going? And what you got in the case?"

"Ain't nothin' much. Just lookin' for a couple dollars pawn."

"Is that so. Well, let's see what's worth a couple dollars."

He grabbed the case away from the boy and tried to open it.

"Where's the key? You open it!"

"Ain't got no key. Ain't never opened it myself."

"Stolen goods!" cried the tough. "Well, we'll just relieve you of the problem. Come on, Jake. Time we got going!"

Jake was backing out the door, his arms laden with loot. "Don't none of you move for five minutes!" he yelled.

The two piled into a red truck parked at the curb and zoomed away. The boy ran out the door and disappeared down the street as the sound of a police siren was heard in the distance.

"How'd we do?"

"Not bad for a dump like that. Let's get across town and try again."

"I've got a surprise package here. A locked suitcase. Little punk was bringing it in to be fenced. Something to look forward to."

"Hey, you don't think that siren's for us? I told the jerks five minutes."

"You don't expect that bunch to follow orders? Better turn left here."

The truck made a turn without slowing and narrowly escaped colliding with an on-coming car. Police whistles shrilled and soon their way was blocked by a large van. The cop came up from behind.

"What's the matter with you? Can't you see the light? Let's have your license."

The driver dug in his pocket. "Gee, officer, I thought I had time to make it."

"The light was still green," lied his companion. "I'll swear to that."

"You can both come down to the station and swear all you like. We're getting fed up with these traffic violations."

CARLOS SAT DISCONSOLATELY IN THE POLICE STATION. All the others in his group had been dismissed after a fruitless hour looking through mug-shots. But Carlos' dark skin and slight accent made him suspect. He might be an illegal alien. And despite his protests that the stolen valise was full of old clothing, he had been forced to telephone his mother and ask her to come to the station to identify him.

Waiting now on a side bench, he saw two prisoners being pushed

through the door. They were handcuffed, because of guns found in the car, and one arresting officer carried a load of suspected loot. Carlos was not immediately aware that his property had followed him to the precinct, but as he watched the stolen goods being piled up near his corner, he suddenly stiffened. Could it be possible? It looked like his case, but was it really the same one?

"Excuse me," he pulled at the sleeve of one of the suspects. "Is that your suitcase? Do you know what's in it?"

"Of course, I know what's in it!" growled the man. "What's it to you? It's all a bloody mistake. We jumped through a red light and now they're treating us like criminals. Just because we had a couple guns . . .!"

"Shut up!" barked the cop beside him. "You'll get yours in short order. Place is pretty busy today."

Carlos subsided onto his bench and tried to look innocent. But his eyes were glued to the suitcase, and the longer he looked the surer he was. It was the bomb! If only his mother would hurry and get him out of here! Then his mission would be accomplished. The case was actually inside the station house and due to go off at noon. In some strange way, it had all been done for him.

AT A QUARTER OF TWELVE, HIS MOTHER ARRIVED, A little gray-haired woman with a shawl over her head. She saw Carlos at once and hurried up to him.

"What happens, Carlos? Why you here? You should be at work."

"Not to worry, Mama. I tell you later. The police, they think I'm illegal. You tell them I'm born here and we'll go home. But hurry, Mama. I'm tired of sitting here."

"You think I tell the police to hurry? You crazy! I get in line."

Carlos grabbed her arm and dragged her to the desk. "I been waiting long time and it was me that got mugged. Now here's my mother. She tell you I'm no illegal. We go home."

"What's your hurry?" growled the sergeant. "There's people ahead of you. We'll get to you in a minute."

"Too many minutes!" cried Carlos, aware of the suitcase lurking at his back. "I been sitting here all morning."

"So fifteen more minutes can't matter. Your mother only just got here."

"Fifteen minutes too long!" Carlos looked at the clock, which had advanced to eleven-fifty. Why had he ever got his mother into this? Why himself? He hoped the timing device in the suitcase was slow. But what if it was fast? It might go off any minute!

"Mama mia, you should not have come here! They should not have sent for you!" He led the confused woman to a bench as far from the brown suitcase as possible.

As he turned for another look at the clock, he was aware of a commotion near the door. An officer was coming in and several others went to speak with him. There was a general hubbub of welcoming voices. Then he saw the dog. A big German shepherd with a glossy coat and intelligent eyes, it welcomed the pats of the officers, but stood obediently close to its master. All of a sudden, it trotted over to the suitcase where it began to sniff and paw, whining excitedly.

"Hey," cried a cop. "Look at that! Must be drugs in that case!"

"It's not valuable, eh?" cried the arresting officer. He seized hold of the suspect and dragged him forward.

"I told you, I don't know what's in it. Belongs to a friend of mine. Left it in the car the other day.

"That so? Well, open it up and let's see."

"Can't open it," said the man. "It's locked and we ain't got the key."

The sergeant was now peering down from his desk. "Well, get it open. This chisel should do the trick."

With all this interest in the suitcase, Carlos was debating whether he could grab his mother and rush out. But suppose it didn't go off? He would then be marked as guilty. He was preparing to jump in front of his mother, while covering his face with his arms, when the owner of the dog spoke up.

"I wouldn't tinker with that," he said. "Captain here's not trained for drugs. He's trained for explosives!"

There was dead silence and everyone moved away from the valise. Shouts broke out. "So get it out of here! Call the bomb squad! The street's too crowded. You got an empty room?"

"Of course, of course!" Doors flung open. The valise was hurriedly carried out and various deadening objects piled over it. As the officers came back, slamming the door, there was a muffled roar from behind it. Carlos looked at the clock. Both hands were on the twelve.

The room seemed to sigh with relief and then came a babble of voices.

"If it hadn't been for that dog! Good old Cap! Comes through every time. And to think we were carrying that thing around all morning!"

The precinct sergeant leaned down from his desk.

"So now we're ready for your case, young man. This is your mother? And she'll swear you were born in the United States?"

What evil had these poor creatures wrought against humanity? What had they done to merit the killing jar and the eager eyes of students watching them writhe and die? It was insane. It was incredibly cruel!

Biology Class

by JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON

LAINIE SAT NEAR THE FRONT OF HER FIFTH PERIOD biology class. She sat motionless, overwhelmed by remorse and intense guilt regarding the white rats she had idly allowed to be rent and butchered the week before. Innocent, red-eyed rodents that refused to bite even when they were teased—why should they be brutally carved limb from limb, organ from organ? Hearts! Livers! Lungs! Intestines! All these spilled and spread upon the biology table for casual inspection, many of the parts still throbbing with a memory of life.

Could there have been an Auschwitz if children had not first learned to appreciate the aesthetics of laboratory torture?

Lainie's moist, brown eyes could not focus on the green chalkboard, upon which tall Mr. Weston scribbled a blur of notes. She blinked. Droplets of tears clung to long, dark lashes. Mr. Weston was lecturing about the life of a chicken inside an egg. Lainie could hear little beyond the screaming of her own conscience.

The pitiable fate of the frogs pricked at the back door of her mind. Harmless, dumb, unwary fellows snapping up flies and hopping about their business of being frogs; a business that was uncomplicated and time consuming. What evil had frogs ever wrought against humanity?

What had they done to merit the killing jar and the eager eyes of students watching them writhe and die? It was insane. It was incredibly, incredibly cruel.

How would she ever forget those frogs scraping pathetically at the slippery glass walls of the doomful jar? They could not know the impossibility of escaping, let alone surviving, the murderous vapors. Later, as though death were not sad enough, their entrails were stretched forth from their bellies and pinned to boards, handled and inspected by clumsy hands, individual organs diagrammed by students with a detached, careless air.

Jointed, severed legs were wired to a battery so that life might be mocked and a theory might be proven for the hundred-thousandth time. A boy in the back of the class giggled, not out of nervousness, but unabashed delight. The dancing legs! The dancing legs!

Then, at long, long last, the wretched remains were laid to rest: sealed in plastic bags and tossed into the incinerator, cremated along with empty milk cartons from the lunchroom and dried leaves from the school lawns. In heaven, would the frogs sort out their own parts and fit themselves back together?

Lainie sighed quietly, mournfully, turning her head so that her eyes might scan the room. The room reeked with evidence of insidious experimentation, decorated with the utensils and results of minuscule deaths and torments. She heard the echoes of tiny, weeping spirits; and it made Lainie's head swim. Somewhere toward the front of the room—Lainie was no longer certain where—the teacher rambled on about which came first, fried chicken or omelets; and students responded with generous laughter.

An entire case of shelves was maintained for the express purpose of displaying diminutive corpses. Lainie tried not to let her gaze wander there. But small ghosts whispered for attention, begged to be acknowledged by someone who cared.

A newborn kitten drifted within a jar of alcohol; sad, accusative eyes glared outward at the class. Next to it, a minuscule octopus lay crumpled in its confining sea of preserving fluid. A two-headed snake appealed helplessly and hopelessly to the newt in the jar next door.

Each specimen was clearly identified with a neatly typed epitaph.

“ARE YOU WITH US TODAY?” MR. WESTON SHOUTED abruptly, having crept upon her as a lynx stalks a hare. She jumped in her seat while the class stifled snickers. Her round, brown eyes looked into the narrowing eyes of the instructor. He hovered above her, a dark giant, surprisingly youthful, thin-lipped, large of brow. He held out an

egg and said, "You, my charming day-dreamer, may do the honors."

She looked wonderingly at the egg and said, "Wh—what honors?"

"Just what have I been talking about these full fifteen minutes?" he demanded angrily.

"Chicken eggs." She knew that much.

"Excellent!" His outstretched arm continued to offer the egg. "This," he said, "is due to hatch in a few days, except that the class is anxious to see how it has developed at its present stage."

Her heart and breath quickened. She looked again at the egg held lightly between Mr. Weston's fingers. "It'll die!" she protested.

"Don't worry your pretty little head," said Mr. Weston. "The Humane Society absolutely will not prosecute."

Lainie heard the class's laughter, but the sound was distant.

"I won't do it," she said firmly, considering how badly she shook.

Mr. Weston took three long, purposeful strides to the front of the room and placed the egg in a porcelain bowl atop the biology table. His voice was slightly strained as he commanded, "Lainie, come up here." What little sympathy he may have felt was limited by his belief that ignorant, childish fears are best curbed whenever they are found. Lainie stood, nervously touched her soft, dark hair with a pale, slender hand; and she walked toward Mr. Weston, sensing the eyes of classmates at her spine. She circled the biology table and stood facing the class, but did not focus on them.

Mr. Weston spoke low enough that few others in the classroom overheard: "You are very near to flunking this course, Lainie. Do you know that? As you dread my class so much, I'm certain you would not happily take it again next year, would you?"

Her faint voice replied, "N—no, sir."

Still speaking so that few others would hear, he said, "You absolutely must overcome this irrational dread of inconsequential deaths. Are you listening to me, Lainie? Just pretend this is an ordinary egg and you are about to prepare it for breakfast. Can you do that? Simply tap it on the edge of the table, pull the shell apart, and let the contents fall into the shallow bowl."

The room was hushed. Every face watched hers. A droplet streaked Lainie's cheek. She pictured the chick floating, dreaming, unsuspecting in its protective shell. She said, "I—I can't."

Weston's jaw visibly tightened. His voice raised. "Do you want to fail this semester?"

She stuttered again that she did not wish to fail the class.

"You are very near to doing so, young lady."

Her unwilling hand inched toward the egg. She lifted it in a quivering

grasp, then coddled it for a moment. Her pleading eyes met those of the teacher, but found no sympathy there.

The shell cracked easily.

The silence of the room shattered as the class cheered her success and bravery.

A premature, wet-feathered bird dropped into the round, white bowl. The yolk on its breast broke on contacting the cold, milky glass. Lainie's attention fixed upon the runnel of slow, yellow blood. The chick lay on its side, gasping unfamiliar air, kicking weak legs in search of the missing walls.

It peeped.

There was a brief, desperate struggle. Its head raised half an inch. Its tiny, bent wings shook. The small beak opened and shut. Eyes blinked with amazement and fright.

Its introduction to the world had come too soon and too swiftly. Its heart gave out. Its struggle ceased.

LAINIE CLOSED HER EYES AND SQUEEZED THE LAST TEAR free. She took a step backward and leaned against the blackboard, arms crossed over her breasts, head rolling from side to side, smearing Mr. Weston's chalked notes. Her eyes did not open when she said softly, matter-of-factly: "You're monsters." The entire room had once more stilled, silenced by shame or uncertainty.

Lainie's eyes popped open, suddenly round. She looked at her fellow students as though she had never seen their like before. A sad, heartfelt soliloquy slipped from her lips: "Why do people profit from senseless death with excited pleasure? Why would anyone go out of their way to gawk at those burnt in a fire or crushed in a car? Why must we wage war and violent sport—or stalk beasts for sake of horrid trophies? Is this the meaning of humanity? *Am I like you?*"

Her eyes gazed again upon the dead chick, a life taken on a dare, or a threat, or the promise of a passing grade. Then she saw the dissecting blade upon the biology table. She snatched the razored instrument and raised it, a motion that caused Mr. Weston to back away from her in alarm. But she did not leap upon him, as her gaze had promised. Rather, she pressed the blade between her own small breasts, piercing her blouse but not quite the flesh.

She exclaimed, "I'm no better fit to live than any of you!"

"Lainie," said the teacher, pleading gently. "You mustn't . . ."

Before he could finish a single sentence, the blade sank out of sight, deep into her body, into her piteous heart. Lainie collapsed onto the floor, sighing once. Her struggle was much shorter and less insistent

than that of the baby chicken.

THE CLASS WAS INSTANTLY UPON ITS FEET, WHISPERING in panic, mouths gaping, eyes filled with dread and disbelief. Weston put a hand to the girl's temple and muttered the single, inevitable word, "Dead."

A boy stumbled around desks and found himself at the door. "I'll go get someone!" he exclaimed, having no idea who that someone would be, but turning the knob with a forced certainty that *something* could be done.

"Wait!" exclaimed Mr. Weston, calling the student back with a gesture. Standing over the lovely, fresh cadaver, a light stirred in his eyes. Mr. Weston turned to the class and said, "Do you realize the opportunity we have here?"

In a moment, the class had calmed and began, one by one, to resume their seats.

SECRET MESSAGE

Okay, members of the Mike Shayne Detective Club, get out your decoders and decipher the following message:

TXEN	TNOM	KIMH	AHSE	RENY
RUTE	NISN	WENA	IRHT	NILL
VDAG	UTNE	ODER	IMTN	TISS

Don't say we didn't warn you!

The coroner said the beautiful blonde had died of natural causes. A shower accident. Broken neck. But Faulkner thought otherwise. It was one of those locked-room mysteries, and he was determined to solve it!

Stuck for the Solution

by DIANE CHAPMAN

DISGUSTEDLY, OFFICER BILL FAULKNER THREW HIS notebook down on the desk and combed his fingers through his curly fair hair. "I'm sure it's murder," the handsome young cop said. "I know who did it. I know why he did it. I just can't figure out how he set it up."

Leaning back in his chair and clasping his hands behind his head, Lieutenant Ramos remarked: "Two out of three isn't bad." A wry smile moved the bristly ends of his graying mustache.

Faulkner snorted. "If you want to help, help. That isn't helping. It isn't even funny."

"All right. Sorry." Good-natured affection broadened the smile. "Tell me the who and why."

"Who did it? Wilbur Maitland, a mousy little CPA. Forty-seven, balding, nearsighted. You get the picture. A real nobody, who decided to terminate his unsuccessful marriage to an ex go-go girl by the name of Lori. Why did he do it? The very dead Mrs. Maitland, twenty-five, a spectacular bottle blonde, apparently had lots of private action while

husby was away at the office. Additional motivation: a thirty-thousand dollar life insurance policy on the little lady to sweeten the woes of widowhood."

"How long had they been married? And why did they get hitched in the first place? They certainly don't sound like a well-matched pair."

"Two and a half years. I suppose she got tired of being a working girl. And lots of guys, especially lonely ones that never had any kind of wife, are suckers for a pretty smile."

"Well," Ramos said slowly, "he can't be too much of a dope. Because according to you he killed his wife and we haven't got a clue, not a hope of nailing him for it. But I've been watching you in action since they assigned you to this precinct and I'll say this for you, Faulkner, you're sharp, you've got a nose for this sort of thing and I'm inclined to have faith in your hunches. Are you sure about this one?"

"Which? Murder, motive or method?"

The lieutenant motioned the young man to sit down. "For the moment I'll accept your conclusions about Maitland's motive and your feeling that he's guilty. So what's your problem about his method? What did the coroner have to say?"

"Natural causes. A shower accident. Broken neck. But it's just too neat. It's one of those locked room riddles."

Lieutenant Ramos waved his hand, as if to wave away the idea. "That only happens on TV, not in real life."

"Yeah, I know." Faulkner nodded dejectedly. "That's why this is bothering me. But here it is. You tell me how he did it. Mrs. Maitland, according to her husband, is in the shower. He hears her fall. Correction: says he hears her fall. He calls to her. No answer. He bangs on the locked bathroom door. No result. He calls the rescue squad and the police. I'm the first one there. Now get this. The door is really locked. For sure. And it doesn't have one of those buttons on the inside knob. It's a regular latch, the kind with a thick metal bar that engages a slot in the door jamb and can only be operated by turning a bolt—a very stiff bolt—on the inside."

The lieutenant gestured for a pause. "Try this. He held the latch back with a thick piece of plastic—credit card, bank card—and then shut the door and slid the card out, allowing the locking mechanism to snap into place. Just the reverse of the old breaking-in technique."

"Not this time. No way. The end of the latch is flat, not beveled. And it isn't spring loaded. The bolt has to be turned all the way for it to lock."

Ramos stroked his mustache. "Window?"

"It was partly open. But the screen, which screws on from the inside,

was in place. Also there were two dozen people around the pool, which happens to be right below the Maitland's second story apartment. It's one of those new complexes, with club house, tennis courts, sauna, the works. All the witnesses agree that nobody came or went through the window. Lots of poolside gossip, however, about the pretty Mrs. M's extracurricular activities in a swinging place like that, and loud arguments with hubby regarding same."

"And what did you say the cause of death was?"

"Broken neck. She supposedly slipped."

"Your wimpy little accountant manhandled her?"

"It wouldn't have taken a great deal of strength. She's sitting at her dressing table, say, and he comes up behind her. One quick twist and she's gone. And now he feels like he's some big macho man. I tell you, the guy did it. And he's proud of it, too, the smirking little creep. Oh, he managed a boo hoo, but I could smell smug, avenging ego all over him."

"All right," the lieutenant said. "You say the door was securely locked?"

The young cop nodded and ran his fingers through his hair. "I had to kick it in. Nothing faked there. The latch mechanism held, good and strong, and actually tore through the receiver plate on the jamb. The hinges looked normal, all the screws in place."

"I get the picture. What happened to the door? Damaged?"

"Bashed in a bit alongside the knob. It was one of those hollow core things. You know, the cheapie interior kind. The apartment manager and the janitor were milling around there too. Said they were going to have to replace the door and the jamb both. Oh, there was one other thing about the door. I can't see what it had to do with any of this, but there was a tiny hole, maybe a sixteenth of an inch across, through the dressing room surface of the door. About as high as the knob and an inch or so in from the hinge edge. Not all the way through the door, just through the one side. I asked Maitland about it and he said he'd never noticed it. Said maybe it was a manufacturing defect or something. The manager and the janitor just shrugged. With a dead lady in the shower I guess it didn't seem very important to them."

His dark eyes shining, Lieutenant Ramos sat forward in his chair. "But it seemed important to you? What did you make of it?"

"I couldn't make anything of it. And I'm not sure it had any significance. I'm just trying to give you everything."

"And possibly you have. Do you suppose the remains of the door are still available?"

Faulkner's eyebrows expressed surprise. "I guess maybe. Why?"

"When did all this happen?"

"Two days ago."

"When is the garbage pickup over there?"

"How should I know that?"

Ramos stood. "A good cop has to know everything. You just better hope they haven't had a pickup since the murder."

"So you think I'm right about this being murder? All this time I've been stuck for the solution and you see it?"

"I see a possibility. Stuck for the solution indeed. Come on, I want to be in on this one."

THEY DROVE TO THE APARTMENT COMPLEX, A WALLED development with a gatehouse and private uniformed guard.

"They think they're buying security for that extra hundred a month," the lieutenant said cynically as Faulkner eased their unmarked car to a stop at the black and white barricade. They identified themselves and the beam swung up.

"You want to see the apartment?"

"No. I want to see the dumpster behind it."

"You're the boss. There it is."

"And there's the junked door. Where are the pieces of the jamb?"

"Inside the dumpster?"

Ramos poked the young cop lightly on the shoulder. "My boy, this may just be the most profitable garbage picking you'll ever do."

They parked the car and got out. This discarded door leaned against the dumpster, one long piece of the jamb still hinged to it. The lieutenant examined the hinges and took out a pocket knife. He flipped out the screwdriver blade and inserted it in the slot of one of the screws that held the hinge plate to the jamb.

"Tight as a loan shark's fist, right?"

Almost to himself, the lieutenant said, "I can't turn it." He tried another. "Let's see what happens now." He folded the screwdriver blade and opened a knife blade.

Faulkner leaned closer. "What are you trying to do, stick it into the wood under the hinge plate?"

"Trying . . ." He grunted with the effort. "And succeeding." He wiggled the knife blade, then withdrew it.

"We gotta dig now?" the young officer asked.

"As a matter of fact, no. Where's the nearest hardware store?"

"Just a couple blocks away."

"Figures. You told me he was smug, sure of himself."

They drove to the store and found a clerk. The lieutenant flashed a

badge. "Are you a regular in this store?"

"Yeah."

"The officer here is going to describe someone. Man who might have been a customer here in the past week or so. You tell us if you recognize him."

The clerk listened to the description of Wilbur Maitland. "Nope."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute. Blonde, twenty-five. One you'd love to have but wouldn't dare take home to meet your mother."

The clerk's eyes lit up. "Oh, yeah. Last week."

"And what did she buy?"

"Well, that's what was kinda weird. 'Gargantua Glue.' You know, that stuff that bonds instantly and holds a ton. Said her husband told her to get it for him. But half a dozen tubes of it? I remember asking her if she was sure she got that right because those tubes aren't very big, you know, but six seemed like an awful lot. But she insisted that's what he told her to get."

"Anything else?"

"A hacksaw."

"Jackpot," the lieutenant muttered under his breath. He took the young officer aside. "This is how he did it. The door part of it.

"After she was dead, he stuffed her in the shower and took the door off by unscrewing the hinges from the jamb. Then he cut the heads off the screws and glued them back in place on the hinges. So they looked like the original installation. But I couldn't turn them and when I put the knife blade in under the hinge there were no screw shafts in the wood. Are you with me so far?"

"Yes. Go on."

"He turned the bolt to extend the latch bar. Then he applied 'Gargantua Glue' to the places in the door jamb where the hinge plates—with the now-dummy screw heads—fit. He closed the door by inserting the latch into its slot and sliding the door into place from the opposite side. That's what the little hole was for. He probably used a screw eye or maybe just a straight screw or even a bent nail in that edge for a handle. The door was actually pivoting on that latch bar. He removed his little temporary handle, waited a few minutes for the glue to make a good solid bond and the door was effectively locked. Then he called for help.

"He did a very neat job. And you assumed—as he thought he could count on everybody assuming—that the essence of the locking was with the latch part of the door. Logical; but in this case, misleading."

"What you're telling me," Faulkner said, "is that the door locked at the hinge side instead of at the latch."

"Exactly."

"I told you he thought he was clever."

"Not clever enough."

The clerk came sliding over. "Excuse me, but I can't help being curious. Tell me, what did her husband end up sticking?"

The lieutenant smiled grimly. "His neck in a noose."

MYSTERY MINIQUIZ

What is the award given annually by The Mystery Writers of America to writers who have excelled in the suspense field?

The Edgar, named (or course) after Edgar Allan Poe.

Boston Blackie came from what city?

San Francisco

Name the private eye featured in books having colors in their titles?

Travis McGee (Nightmare in Pink, Darker Than Amber, The Dreadful Lemon Sky, etc.)

Who lived at 221B Bagel Street?

Schlock Homes, Robert L. Fish's parody of you-know-who.

Alone in his study, a wealthy socialite muses, "Criminals are a superstitious, cowardly lot, so my disguise must be able to strike terror into their hearts. Must be a creature of the night, black, terrible . . ." What costumed superhero did this man become?

Bruce Wayne became Batman

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Stiff Competition

BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

One of the most ingenious and best plotted mysteries in a long time is *Death Wishes* by Philip Loraine. This is a winner from the first page onward. Mr. Loraine succeeds brilliantly in producing one startling surprise after another for the reader, the very essence of superior suspense writing. Catherine Walden barely knew her wealthy father, but on his death she stands to inherit a notable chateau in France and a distinguished art collection of great value. When she goes there to claim her inheritance, the fun begins. And it is great fun with the gossiping, prying, insatiably-curious Frenchwomen of the local area lending wonderful local color. This is the kind of book that you'll remember weeks after you've read it; it's that good. Don't miss this one! (St. Martin's, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The Popular Press of Bowling Green University is back again, this time with a volume containing six adventures of Robert Leslie Bellem's Hollywood detective, Dan Turner. These pulp stories have been reproduced from the original type which gives the flavor of the twenties at the expense of some clarity. Don is a hard-boiled private eye who lives with action and the ever-present females in disarray whose breasts are always in evidence and never quite revealed. There is an element of parody in the Dan Turner stories that enriches their flavor. The original illustrations are included together with an introduction by John Wooley. (Popular Culture Press, Bowling Green, Ohio 43403, \$16.95 in hardback, \$7.95 in wrappers)

Col. Clive Egleton has come up with a lively tale of espionage establishments and malfeasance in high places in his new novel *A Conflict of Interests*. The old theme of a high-priced call girl who blackmails her prominent clients is used again, but very effectively and with considerable realism. An honest and persistent cop pursues the case while all sorts of intelligence types pursue him to keep the lid on. Very well done by a man whose long experience in the British military serves him well as an author. (Atheneum, \$13.95)

★ ★ ★

This month's tongue in cheek entry comes from Stephen Kaplan who styles himself a vampirologist. Dr. Kaplan founded the Vampire Research Center in 1972. He recounts a number of real vampires he has dug up (so to speak) and provides the text of interviews. There's even a letter from a "vampire-like person" reproduced from the original. The book is called *Vampires Are* with a modest by-line for the actual writer, Carole Kane. ETC Publications, Drawer ETC, Palm Springs, CA 92263-1608. \$11.95 in hardcover, \$6.95 in wrappers.

★ ★ ★

Barbara Moore debuts as a mystery author with *The Doberman Wore Black*. Obviously Mrs. Moore likes animals, as does her protagonist, Gordon Christy D.V.M. The action takes place in Vail, Colorado, the celebrated ski resort where Dr. Christy goes to fill in for another vet who is on vacation. There he unwittingly becomes a detective. There is a very moving scene in which an old and infirm dog is brought in to be "put to sleep" by the compassionate doctor who knows that many of his patients are no more than human. There are two murders for the doctor to solve and some vivid use of the high-priced resort background. Hopefully, Dr. Christy will be back in another book after this auspicious debut. (St. Martins, \$13.95)

★ ★ ★

Dodd Mead in producing a series of their Red Badge mysteries in a uniform paperback format. These are attractive reprints of some famous titles, including Bill McGivern's *The Big Heat* and *Rogue Cop*, Michael Innes' *The Bloody Wood* and Hugh Pentacost's *The Cannibal Who Overate*. These are \$3.50 each.

★ ★ ★

At the same time Walker and company is putting out a uniform collection under the title *Walker British Mystery*. For many years this publisher has specialized in offering distinguished British mystery authors in American editions, so there is an extensive backlog available

for this new series. Recent titles include W.J. Burley's *To Kill a Cat*, Elizabeth Lemarchand's *Suddenly While Gardening*, John Sladek's *Invisible Green*, J.G. Jeffries' *A Wicked Way to Die*, *Poison People* by William Haggard and *Dangerous to Know* by the very talented Marian Babson. These uniform paperbacks are \$2.95 each.

☆ ☆ ☆

There may be some confusion about the continuing series *Best Detective Stories of the Year*. Many of the recent annual issues have been edited by the prolific and very capable Edward D. Hoch, possibly the most frequently published living author. Mr. Hoch has apparently discontinued his editorship here and is offering instead a new series from Walker called *The Year's Best Mystery and Suspense Stories*. The second volume, for 1983, now available in wrappers for \$6.95, is full of excellent material by top names in the mystery/suspense genre. To start off, you might try Paul Theroux's *A Tomb With a View*.

☆ ☆ ☆

George Sims offers a new novel this month, *The Keys of Death*. The setting is largely London, where there is a fabulously wealthy man who has a passion for privacy in the manner of Howard Hughes. This man gives a party to revive the Hellfire Club with guests in period costume and several attractive models hired to attend and spice up the affair. One of them sees something she should not and the results are drastic. The detective is Jack Quinn, an antique dealer who is called upon to fit the many complex pieces together. This is not a memorable mystery, but it is a "good read" by an experienced craftsman from MacMillan (England), £5.95 (pounds)

☆ ☆ ☆

A fine new anthology is called *An International Treasury of Mystery & Suspense*. It was put together by Marie R. Reno, who also provides an introduction. Some of the material is well known and readily available, such as Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express*, but there are also many other shorter works of greater interest, such as Arthur Upfield's only known short story about detective Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte, one of the giants in the literature. If it's possible that you've missed Upfield, his stories of Australia and his half-aborigine detective are established classics. In this volume the various entries are grouped under conventional, but valid headings. This is a good volume to have on your bedside reading table. (Doubleday, \$15.95)

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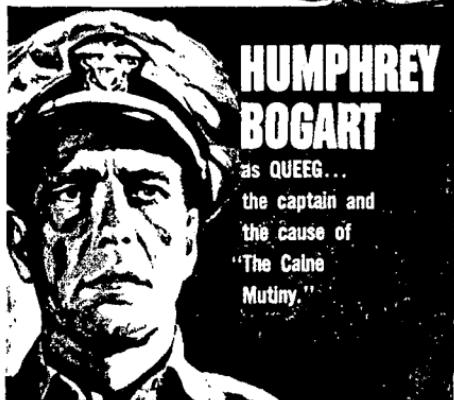
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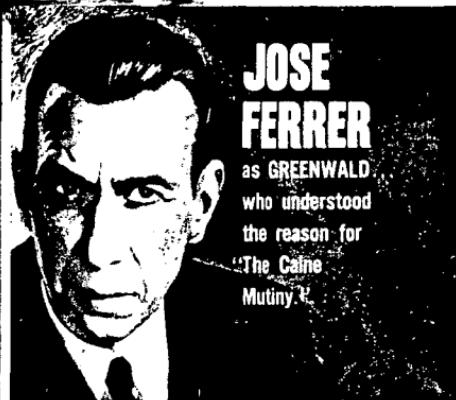
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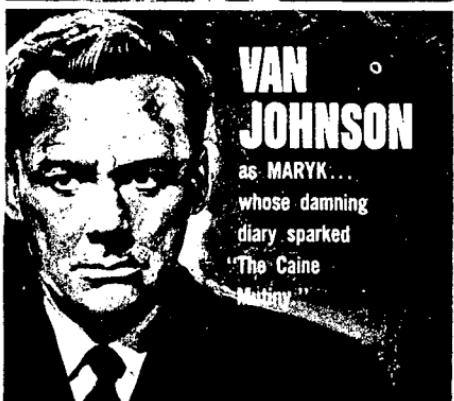
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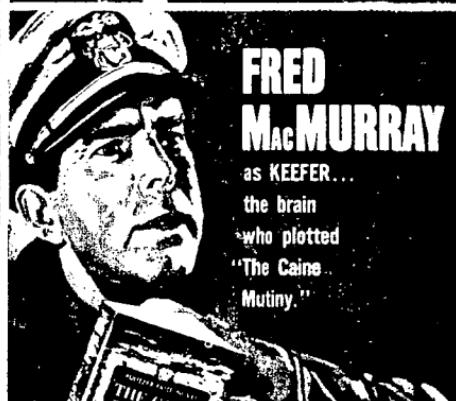
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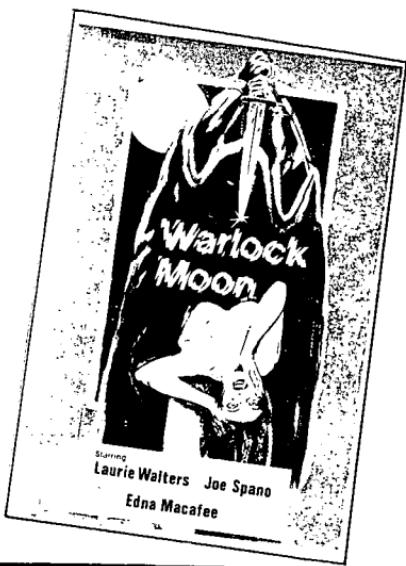
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